"LEFT-WING" COMMUNISM: AN INFANTILE DISORDER

An Attempt at a Popular Discussion on Marxist Strategy and Tactics

BY

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REVISED TRANSLATION

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THE present work is dated by Lenin April 27, 1920. On May 12, 1920, Lenin added several appendices dealing with later developments in the revolutionary movements of Germany, Italy and Holland. The pamphlet was published in Russian on June 20, 1920, and was simultaneously issued in English, German and French translations.

Several versions of the English translation were published in the United States. Inadequate as the American editions were, the pamphlet has been out of print for some time. The present edition is a new translation based upon the text published in Vol. XXV of the third revised edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*, prepared by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, which is in possession of the original manuscript of *"Left-Wing" Communism.*

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In What Sense Can We Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution?

During the first months after the conquest of political power by the proletariat in Russia (November 7, [October 25] 1917) it might have appeared that the tremendous differences between backward Russia and the advanced countries of western Europe will cause the proletarian revolution in these latter countries to have very little resemblance to ours. Now we already have very considerable international experience which very definitely establishes the fact that some of the fundamental features of our revolution have a significance which is not local, not peculiarly national, not Russian only, but international. I speak here of international significance not in the broad sense of the term: Not some but all fundamental and many secondary features of our revolution are of international significance in the sense of the influence it has upon all countries. I speak of it in the narrower sense, *i.e.*, by international significance I mean the international significance or the historical inevitability of a repetition on an international scale of what has taken place here, and it must be admitted that some of the fundamental features of our revolution possess such international significance.

Of course, it would be a very great mistake to exaggerate this truth and to apply it to more than some of the fundamental features of our revolution. It would also be a mistake to lose sight of the fact that, after the victory of the proletarian revolution in at least one of the advanced countries, things will, in all probability, take a sharp turn, *viz.*, Russia will cease to be the model country and once again become a backward (in the "Soviet" and in the socialist sense) country.

But at the present historical moment the situation is precisely that the Russian model reveals to *all* countries something that is very essential in their near and inevitable future. The advanced workers in every land have long understood this, although in most cases they

did not so much understand it as grasp it, sense it, by their revolutionary class instinct. Herein lies the international "significance" (in the narrow sense of the term) of the Soviet power as well as of the fundamentals of Bolshevik theory and tactics. This the "revolutionary" leaders of the Second International, such as Kautsky in Germany and Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler in Austria, failed to understand, thereby exposing themselves as reactionaries and advocates of the worst kind of opportunism and social treachery. Incidentally, the anonymous pamphlet, *The World Revolution* (*Weltrevolution*),* which appeared in 1919 in Vienna (*Sozialistische Bücherei*, Heft 11; Ignaz Brand), shows with particular clarity their whole process of thought, their circle of reasoning, or, what is more correct, the whole depth of their stupidity, pedantry, baseness, and betrayal of working class interests—and all this under the guise of "defending" the idea of "world revolution."

But we shall have to discuss this pamphlet in greater detail some other time. Here we shall note only one more point: in the long, long past, when Kautsky was still a Marxist and not a renegade, in approaching the question as a historian he foresaw the possibility of a situation arising in which the revolutionary spirit of the Russian proletariat would serve as a model for western Europe. This was in 1902, when Kautsky wrote an article, entitled "The Slavs and the Revolution," for the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra* [*Spark*]. In this article he wrote as follows:

> At the present time (in contradistinction to the year 1848) it may be assumed that not only have the Slavs entered the ranks of the revolutionary peoples but also that the centre of gravity of revolutionary thought and revolutionary action is shifting ever more and more towards the Slavs. The revolutionary centre is shifting from the West to the East. In the first half of the nineteenth century it was in France, at times in England. In 1848 Germany entered the ranks of revolutionary nations. . . . The new century opens with such events as induce us to think that we are approaching a further shifting of the revolutionary centre, namely, to *Russia* . . . Russia, which has imbibed so much revolutionary initiative from the West, is now perhaps herself ready to serve as a source of revolutionary energy for the latter. The Russian revolutionary movement, which is now flaring up, will prove perhaps the most potent means for driving out that spirit of flabby philistinism and sober politics which is beginning to spread in our ranks; it will cause the eagerness for struggle and passionate devotion to our great ideals to flare up in bright flames again. Russia has long ceased to be merely a bulwark of reaction and absolutism for western Europe. Now, perhaps, the very opposite is the case. Western Europe is becoming the bulwark of reaction and absolutism in

* Written by Otto Bauer.—*Ed.*

Russia. . . . Perhaps the Russian revolutionaries would have settled with the Tsar long ago, had they not been compelled to fight simultaneously against his ally, European capital. Let us hope that this time they will succeed in settling with both enemies, and that the new "Holy Alliance" will collapse more quickly than its predecessors. But, however the present struggle in Russia may end, the blood and suffering of the martyrs, whom it is creating, unfortunately, in too great numbers, will not have been in vain. They will nourish the shoots of social upheaval throughout the entire civilised world and cause their more rapid and luxuriant growth. In 1848 the Slavs were the biting frost which blighted the flowers of the peoples' spring. Perhaps now they are destined to be the storm that will break the ice of reaction and will bring the peoples a new, happy spring.*

How well Karl Kautsky wrote eighteen years ago!

II

One of the Basic Prerequisites for the Success of the Bolsheviks

Certainly almost everyone now realises that the Bolsheviks could not have maintained themselves in power for two and one-half years, and not even for two and one-half months, without the strictest discipline, the truly iron discipline in our Party and without the fullest and unreserved support rendered it by the whole mass of the working class, that is, by all those belonging to this class who think, who are honest, self-sacrificing, influential and capable of leading and attracting the backward masses.

The dictatorship of the proletariat is the most determined and the most ruthless war waged by the new class against the *more powerful* enemy, against the bourgeoisie, whose resistance is increased *tenfold* by its overthrow (even though only in one country) and whose power lies not only in the strength of international capital, in the strength and durability of the international connections of the bourgeoisie, but also in the *force of habit*, in the strength of *small-scale production*. For, unfortunately, very, very much of small-scale production still remains in the world, and small-scale production *gives* birth to capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale. For all these reasons the dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary, and victory

* Karl Kautsky, "The Slavs and the Revolution," *Iskra*, No. 18, March 10, 1902.

over the bourgeoisie is impossible without a long, stubborn and desperate war of life and death, a war which requires perseverance, discipline, firmness, inflexibility, and unity of will.

I repeat, the experience of the victorious dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia has clearly shown to those who are unable to think or who have not had occasion to ponder over this question, that absolute centralisation and the strictest discipline of the proletariat are one of the basic conditions for victory over the bourgeoisie.

This has often been discussed. But far from enough thought has been given to the question as to what it means, and under what conditions it is possible. Would it not be better *more frequently* to accompany greetings to the Soviet power and the Bolsheviks by a *very serious analysis* of the reasons *why* the latter were able to build up the discipline necessary for the revolutionary proletariat?

Bolshevism, as a trend of political thought and as a political party, has existed since 1903. Only the history of Bolshevism during the *whole* period of its existence can satisfactorily explain why it was able to build up and maintain, under most difficult conditions, the iron discipline necessary for the victory of the proletariat.

And first of all, the question arises: how is the discipline of the revolutionary party of the proletariat maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its firmness, self-sacrifice, and heroism. Secondly, by its ability to link itself with, to keep in close touch with, and, to a certain degree, if you will, merge itself with the broadest masses of the toilers—primarily with the proletarian *but also with the non-proletarian* toiling masses. Thirdly, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard and by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided that the broadest masses become convinced of this correctness *by their own experience*. Without these conditions discipline in a revolutionary party that is really capable of being a party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and to transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions all attempts to establish discipline are inevitably transformed into trifling phrase-mongering and empty gestures. On the other hand, these conditions cannot arise all at once. They are created only through prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated only by cor-

rect revolutionary theory, which in its turn is not a dogma but assumes complete shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.

If in 1917-1920, under the greatest difficulties, Bolshevism could build up and successfully carry out the strictest centralisation and iron discipline, it was due simply to a number of historical peculiarities of Russia.

On the one hand, Bolshevism arose in 1903 on the very firm foundation of Marxian theory. And the correctness of this—and only this—revolutionary theory has been proved not only by the experience of all countries during the entire nineteenth century but particularly by the experience of the wanderings and vacillations, the mistakes and disappointments of revolutionary thought in Russia. For almost half a century—approximately between the 'forties and 'nineties of last century—advanced thinkers in Russia, under the oppression of an unprecedented, savage and reactionary tsarism, sought eagerly for the correct revolutionary theory, following each and every "last word" in Europe and America in this sphere with astonishing diligence and thoroughness. Russia achieved Marxism, as the only correct revolutionary theory, virtually through *suffering*, by a half century of unprecedented torments and sacrifice, of unprecedented revolutionary heroism, incredible energy, painstaking search and study, testing in practice, disappointments, checking, and comparison with European experience. Thanks to the emigration enforced by tsarism, revolutionary Russia, in the second half of the nineteenth century, possessed such a wealth of international connections and such excellent information about world forms and theories of the revolutionary movement as no other country in the world possessed.

On the other hand, having arisen on this granite theoretical foundation, Bolshevism passed through fifteen years (1903-1917) of practical history which, in wealth of experience, has had no equal anywhere else in the world. For no other country during these fifteen years had anything even approximating this revolutionary experience, this rapid and varied succession of different forms of the movement—legal and illegal, peaceful and stormy, open and underground, small circles and mass movements, parliamentary and terrorist. In no other country was there concentrated during so short a period of time such a wealth of forms, shades and methods of struggle involving *all* classes of modern society, and, moreover, of a

struggle which, owing to the backwardness of the country and the heavy yoke of tsarism, was maturing with exceptional rapidity and assimilating most eagerly and successfully the corresponding "last word" of American and European political experience.

III

The Principal Stages in the History of Bolshevism

The years of preparation for the revolution (1903-1905): The approach of the great storm is felt everywhere. All classes are in a state of ferment and preparation. Abroad, the emigrant press * raises theoretically *all* the fundamental problems of the revolution. The representatives of the three main classes, of the three principal political trends—the liberal-bourgeois, petty-bourgeois democratic (concealed under the labels of "Social-Democratic" and "Socialist-Revolutionary"), and proletarian-revolutionary trends—anticipate and prepare for the approaching open class struggle by a most bitter fight on questions of programme and tactics. *All* the questions, around which the masses waged an armed struggle in 1905-1907 and 1917-1920, can (and should) be traced in their embryonic form in the press of that time. Besides these three main trends, there are, of course, a great number of intermediary, transitory, indefinite forms. To put it more correctly: in the struggle of the press, parties, factions, groups, were crystallised those ideological-political trends which are actually of a class character; the classes forged for themselves the requisite ideological-political weapons for the coming battles.

The years of revolution (1905-1907): All classes come out into the open. All views on programme and tactics are tested by the action of the masses. There is a strike movement unprecedented in extent and acuteness. The economic strike develops into a political strike and the latter develops into insurrection. The relations between the proletariat as the leader and the vacillating, unstable peasantry as the led are tested in practice. The Soviet form of organisation is born in the spontaneous development of the struggle. The controversies of that time concerning the significance of Soviets anticipate the great struggle of 1917-1920. The interchange of par-

* The leading organs of the different revolutionary parties were on account of their illegal status published abroad and smuggled into Russia.—*Ed.*

liamentary and non-parliamentary forms of struggle, of tactics of boycotting parliamentarism and tactics of participating in parliamentarism, of legal and illegal methods of struggle, and likewise their interrelations and connections—all this is distinguished by a wonderful richness of content. As regards the masses and leaders, classes and parties learning the fundamentals of political science, one month of this period was equivalent to a whole year of "peaceful," "constitutional" development. Without the "general rehearsal" of 1905, the victory of the October Revolution, 1917, would have been impossible.

The years of reaction (1907-1910): Tsarism is victorious. All the revolutionary and opposition parties have been defeated. Depression, demoralisation, splits, discord, renegacy and pornography instead of politics. There is an increased drift towards philosophic idealism; mysticism is used as a cloak for counter-revolutionary moods. But at the same time, it is precisely the great defeat that gives the revolutionary parties and the revolutionary class a real and very useful lesson, a lesson in historical dialectics, a lesson in the understanding and in the art of carrying on the political struggle. One recognises one's friends in time of misfortune. Defeated armies learn their lesson well.

Victorious tsarism is compelled speedily to destroy all remnants of the pre-bourgeois, patriarchal mode of life in Russia. Russia's development along bourgeois lines proceeds with remarkable rapidity. Illusions, extra-class and above-class illusions as to the possibility of avoiding capitalism, are scattered to the winds. The class struggle manifests itself in a new and more distinct form.

The revolutionary parties must complete their education. They have learned to attack. Now they must understand that it is necessary to supplement this knowledge with the knowledge of how to retreat properly. They must understand—and the revolutionary class by its own bitter experience learns to understand—that victory is impossible without having learned both how to attack and how to retreat correctly. Of all the defeated opposition and revolutionary parties the Bolsheviks effected the most orderly retreat, with the least loss to their "army," with the nucleus of their party best preserved, with the fewest splits (in the sense of deep, irremediable splits), with the least demoralisation, and in the best condition to renew work on the broadest scale and in the most correct and energetic manner. The Bolsheviks achieved this only because they

ruthlessly exposed and drove out the revolutionary phrasemongers, who refused to understand that it was necessary to retreat, that it was necessary to know how to retreat, that it was absolutely necessary for them to learn how to work legally in the most reactionary parliaments, in the most reactionary trade unions, co-operative societies, insurance societies and similar organisations.

The years of revival (1910-1914): At first the revival was incredibly slow; then, after the Lena events in 1912,* it was somewhat more rapid. Overcoming enormous difficulties, the Bolsheviks pushed aside the Mensheviks, whose rôle as bourgeois agents in the working class movement was perfectly understood by the entire bourgeoisie after 1905, and who, therefore, were supported in a thousand ways by the entire bourgeoisie against the Bolsheviks. But the latter would never have succeeded in doing this, had they not pursued the correct tactics of co-ordinating illegal work with the obligatory utilisation of "legal possibilities." In the arch-reactionary Duma the Bolsheviks won all the labour *curia.***

The first imperialist world war (1914-1917): Legal parliamentarism, under conditions of an extremely reactionary "parliament," renders very useful service to the Party of the revolutionary proletariat, to the Bolsheviks. The Bolshevik deputies are exiled to Siberia. In the emigrant press all shades of opinion—social-imperialism, social-chauvinism, social-patriotism, consistent and inconsistent internationalism, pacifism, and the revolutionary repudiation of pacifist illusions—find full expression. The learned fools and the old women of the Second International, who had arrogantly and contemptuously turned up their noses at the abundance of "factions" in Russian Socialism and the sharpness of the struggle among them, were unable, when the war deprived them of their much lauded "legality" in *all* the advanced countries, to organise anything even approximating such a free (illegal) interchange of views and such a free (illegal) working out of correct views as the Russian revolutionaries did in Switzerland and in a number of other countries. Precisely because of this both the outright social-patriots and the

* The shooting of the striking miners in the Lena goldfields (Siberia) in April 1912, which gave rise to a wave of protest strikes all over Russia and stimulated the revival of the revolutionary movement.—*Ed.*

** Electoral colleges. According to the electoral laws then in operation the electors were divided into class electoral colleges, the workers voting in a separate college.—*Ed.*

"Kautskyists" of all countries proved to be the worst traitors to the proletariat. And if Bolshevism was able to attain victory in 1917-1920, one of the basic reasons for this victory was that Bolshevism, ever since the end of 1914, had been ruthlessly exposing the baseness, depravity, and abominableness of social-chauvinism and "Kautskyism" (to which Longuetism in France, the views of the leaders of the Independent Labour Party and the Fabians in England, and of Turati in Italy, correspond), while the masses had become ever more and more convinced from their own experience, of the correctness of the views of the Bolsheviks.

The second revolution in Russia (March-November 1917): The incredible decrepitude and obsolescence of tsarism created (with the aid of the blows and burdens of the terrible war) a tremendous destructive power which was now directed against it. In a few days Russia was turned into a democratic, bourgeois republic, more free, considering the state of war, than any other country in the world. The leaders of the opposition and revolutionary parties began to set up a government, just as in the most "strictly parliamentary" republics; and the fact that a man had been a leader of an opposition party, even though in the most reactionary parliament imaginable, *assisted* him in his subsequent rôle in the revolution.

In a few weeks the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries had excellently learned all the methods and manners, arguments and sophistries of the European heroes of the Second International, of the ministerialists and other opportunist rabble. All that we now read about the Scheidemanns and Noskes, about Kautsky and Hilferding, Renner and Austerlitz, Otto Bauer and Fritz Adler, Turati and Longuet, about the Fabians and the leaders of the Independent Labour Party in England—all this seems to us, and, in reality, is, a dreary repetition, the singing over and over again of an old, familiar refrain. Our Mensheviks have been like that for ever so long. History played a joke, and made the opportunists of a backward country anticipate the opportunists of a number of advanced countries.

All the heroes of the Second International have suffered bankruptcy and disgraced themselves on the question of the rôle and significance of the Soviets and the Soviet power; the leaders of three very important parties which have now left the Second International (namely, the German Independent Social-Democratic Party, the French Longuetists and the British Independent Labour Party) have

disgraced themselves and got mixed up on this question in an exceptionally "striking" way; they have all turned out to be slaves to the prejudices of petty-bourgeois democracy (quite in the spirit of the petty bourgeois of 1848 who called themselves "Social-Democrats")—but the Mensheviks had *already* given us an example of *all this.* History played the following joke: in Russia, in 1905, the Soviets were born; in March-November 1917, they were falsified by the Mensheviks who went bankrupt because of their inability to understand the rôle and significance of the Soviets; and now, the idea of the Soviet power has come to life all over the world and is spreading among the proletariat of all countries with unprecedented rapidity; but *everywhere* the old heroes of the Second International have also gone bankrupt because, they, like our Mensheviks, were unable to understand the rôle and significance of Soviets. Experience has proved that on some very essential questions concerning the proletarian revolution, *all* countries will inevitably have to go through what Russia has gone through.

The Bolsheviks began their victorious struggle against the parliamentary (in reality) bourgeois republic and against the Mensheviks very cautiously, and, contrary to the views now often met with in Europe and America, the preparations for it were by no means a simple matter. We did *not* call for the overthrow of the government at the beginning of the period indicated, but explained that it was impossible to overthrow it until the composition and the mood of the Soviets had been changed. We did not proclaim a boycott of the bourgeois parliament, of the Constituent Assembly, but declared—after the April (1917) Conference of our Party—officially declared in the name of the Party, that a bourgeois republic with a Constituent Assembly is better than one without a Constituent Assembly, but that a "Workers' and Peasants'" republic, a Soviet republic, is better than any bourgeois-democratic, parliamentary republic. Without such careful, thorough, elaborate and prolonged preparation we could not have obtained victory in November [October] 1917, nor have maintained this victory.

IV

In the Struggle Against What Enemies Within the Working Class Movement Did Bolshevism Grow, Gain Strength and Become Steeled?

First of all, and principally, in the struggle against opportunism, which, in 1914, definitely grew into social-chauvinism and definitely went over to the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. This was naturally the principal enemy of Bolshevism in the working class movement. This enemy remains the principal enemy also on an international scale. This enemy has claimed, and still claims, most of the attention of the Bolsheviks. This side of the activities of the Bolsheviks is now fairly well known abroad.

Something else, however, must be said of the other enemy of Bolshevism in the working class movement. It is not yet sufficiently known abroad that Bolshevism grew, took shape, and became steeled in long years of struggle against *petty-bourgeois revolutionism*, which smacks of, or borrows something from, anarchism, and which differs in all essentials from the conditions and requirements of the sustained proletarian class struggle. For Marxists it is well established theoretically—and the experience of all European revolutions and revolutionary movements has fully confirmed it—that the small proprietor (a social type that is very widely represented in many European countries), who, under capitalism, suffers constant oppression and very often an incredibly sharp and rapid worsening of conditions of life and even ruin, easily becomes extremely revolutionary, but is incapable of displaying perseverance, ability to organise, discipline, and firmness. The petty bourgeois, "furious" over the horrors of capitalism, is a social phenomenon which, like anarchism, is characteristic of all capitalist countries. The instability of such revolutionism, its barrenness, its ability to become swiftly transformed into submission, apathy, phantasy, and even into a "mad" infatuation with one or another bourgeois "fad"—all this is a matter of common knowledge. But a theoretical, abstract recognition of these truths does not at all free revolutionary parties from old mistakes, which always crop up at unexpected moments, in a somewhat new form, in entirely new vestments or surroundings, in peculiar—more or less peculiar—circumstances.

Anarchism was often a sort of punishment for the opportunist sins

of the working class movement. Both monstrosities mutually supplemented each other. And if, in Russia, notwithstanding the fact that its population is more petty-bourgeois in character than that in European countries, anarchism exercised comparatively insignificant influence during both revolutions (1905 and 1917) and during the preparatory periods of these revolutions, this fact must, undoubtedly, be placed partly to the credit of Bolshevism, which always carried on a most ruthless and uncompromising struggle against opportunism. I say "partly," for a still more important rôle in weakening the influence of anarchism in Russia was played by the fact that it had the opportunity in the past (in the seventies of the nineteenth century) to develop with exceptional luxuriance and utterly to reveal its incorrectness and unfitness as a guiding theory for the revolutionary class.

At its inception in 1903, Bolshevism took over the tradition of ruthless struggle against petty-bourgeois, semi-anarchist (or dilettante-anarchist) revolutionism. This tradition had always existed in revolutionary Social-Democracy, and became particularly deep-rooted in Russia in 1900-1903, when the foundations for a mass party of the revolutionary proletariat were being laid. Bolshevism took over and continued the struggle against the party which, more than any other, expressed tendencies of petty-bourgeois revolutionism, namely, the "Socialist-Revolutionary" Party, and waged this struggle on three main points. First, this party, rejecting Marxism, stubbornly refused to (or perhaps it would be more correct to say, could not) understand the necessity of a strictly objective estimate of the class forces and their interrelations before every political action. Secondly, this party considered itself to be particularly "revolutionary" and "Left" on account of its recognition of individual acts of terror and attempts at assassination—tactics which we Marxists decidedly rejected. Of course, we rejected individual acts of terror only out of considerations of expediency; upon those who "on principle" were capable of condemning the terror of the great French Revolution or terror in general employed by a victorious revolutionary party which is besieged by the bourgeoisie of the whole world—upon such people even Plekhanov in 1900-1903, when he was a Marxist and revolutionary, heaped ridicule and scorn. Thirdly, the Socialist-Revolutionaries thought it was very "Left" to sneer at the comparatively insignificant opportunist sins of German Social-Democracy, while at the same time themselves imitating the extreme

opportunists of that party, as, for example, on the agrarian question, or on the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

History, by the way, has now on a large, world-historic scale, confirmed the opinion that we have always advocated, *viz.*, that *revolutionary* German Social-Democracy (note that as far back as 1900-1903, Plekhanov demanded the expulsion of Bernstein from the party, and in 1913 the Bolsheviks always continuing this tradition, exposed the baseness, depravity and treachery of Legien *), that revolutionary German Social-Democracy *came closest* to being the party which the revolutionary proletariat required to enable it to attain victory. Now, in 1920, after all the ignominious failures and crises that have occurred during the war and the first years after the war, it can plainly be seen that of all the western parties it was German revolutionary Social-Democracy which produced the best leaders and which restored itself, healed its wounds, and gained new strength more rapidly than the others. This may be seen both in the party of the Spartacists and in the proletarian Left wing of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, which wages an incessant struggle against the opportunism and spinelessness of the Kautskys, Hilferdings, Ledebours, and Crispiens. If we cast a general glance at the historical period which is now fully closed, *i.e.*, the period from the Paris Commune to the first Socialist Soviet Republic, we will find that, in general, the relation between Marxism and anarchism assumes most definite and incontestable outlines. In the final analysis, Marxism proved to be correct, and although the anarchists rightly pointed to the opportunistic character of the conceptions of the state that prevailed among the majority of the Socialist parties, it must be stated in the first place, that this opportunism was based upon distortion and even deliberate suppression of Marx's views on the state (in my book, *State and Revolution*,** I called attention to the fact that for thirty-six years, from 1875 to 1911, Bebel kept secret a letter by Engels which very vividly, pointedly, directly, and clearly exposed the opportunism of the stock Social-Democratic conceptions of the state), and, secondly, that the correction of these opportunistic views, the recognition of the Soviet power and of its superiority over bourgeois parliamentary democracy, that all this has

* See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XVII, article entitled "What Should Not Be Imitated in the German Working Class Movement."—*Ed.*

** See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, Book 2, pp. 200-02, also Little Lenin Library, Vol. 14, pp. 54-56.—*Ed.*

been proceeding most rapidly and broadly precisely out of the depths of the most truly Marxian trends in the European and American Socialist parties.

On two occasions the struggle of Bolshevism against "Left" deviations within its own party assumed particularly large proportions: in 1908, on the question of whether or not to participate in the most reactionary "parliament" and in the legal workers' societies which were restricted by the most reactionary laws; and again in 1918 (the Brest-Litovsk Treaty) on the question of whether this or that "compromise" is admissible.

In 1908 the "Left" Bolsheviks were expelled from the Party for their stubborn refusal to understand the necessity of participating in the most reactionary "parliament." The "Lefts"—among whom were many very excellent revolutionaries, who subsequently bore (and still bear) the title of member of the Communist Party with honour—based themselves particularly on the successful experiment in the boycott of 1905. When in August 1905 the Tsar proclaimed the convocation of an advisory "parliament," the Bolsheviks declared a boycott against it—unlike all the opposition parties and the Mensheviks—and the Revolution of October 1905 actually swept away that "parliament." At that time the boycott proved correct, not because non-participation in reactionary parliaments is correct as a general principle, but because we correctly estimated the objective situation as one that was leading to the rapid transformation of the mass strikes into political strikes, then into revolutionary strikes, and after that, into insurrection. Moreover, the struggle then centered upon the question of whether to leave the convocation of the first representative assembly to the Tsar, or to attempt to wrest this convocation out of the hands of the old government. Inasmuch as there was not, nor could there be, any certainty that an analogous objective situation would arise, any certainty of an equal trend and rate of development, the boycott ceased to be the correct policy.

The Bolshevik boycott of "parliament" in 1905 enriched the revolutionary proletariat with highly valuable political experience and showed that in combining legal with illegal, parliamentary with non-parliamentary forms of struggle, it is sometimes useful and even essential to be able to reject parliamentary forms. But it is a very great mistake to apply this experience blindly, imitatively, and uncritically to *other* conditions and to *other* circumstances. The boycott of the "Duma" by the Bolsheviks in 1906 was a mistake, although

a small and easily remediable one.* The mistake of boycotting the Duma in 1907, 1908 and in subsequent years was a serious one and difficult to remedy, because on the one hand, a very rapid rise of the revolutionary tide and its transformation into insurrection could not be expected, and on the other hand, the whole historical situation of the revived bourgeois monarchy called for the combining of legal with illegal work. Now, in looking back on this historical period that is now fully closed, and whose connection with the subsequent periods has already been fully revealed, it becomes particularly clear that the Bolsheviks *could not have* preserved (let alone strengthened, developed and reinforced) the sound core of the revolutionary Party of the proletariat in 1908-1914, had they not strenuously fought for and preserved the viewpoint that it is *obligatory* to combine legal with illegal forms of struggle, that it is *obligatory* to participate even in the most reactionary parliament and in a number of other institutions that are restricted by reactionary laws (insurance societies, etc.).

In 1918 things did not go so far as a split. The "Left" Communists at that time formed only a separate group or "faction" within our party, and even this was short-lived. In the same year the most prominent representatives of "Left Communism," for example, Comrades Radek and Bukharin, openly admitted their mistake. It had seemed to them that the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was inadmissible on principle and a compromise with the imperialists that was harmful to the Party of the revolutionary proletariat. It was indeed a compromise with the imperialists, but it was a compromise which, under the given circumstances, was *obligatory*.

To-day, when I hear our tactics in signing the Brest-Litovsk Treaty assailed, for instance, by the Socialist-Revolutionaries, or when I hear a remark such as that made by Comrade Lansbury in conversation with me: "Our British trade union leaders say that if it is permissible for the Bolsheviks to compromise, then it is permissible for them also," I usually reply first of all by giving a simple and "popular" example:

Imagine that your automobile is held up by armed bandits. You hand them over your money, passport, revolver, automobile. In

* What is said of individuals is applicable—with necessary modifications—to politics and parties. It is not he who makes no mistakes who is wise. There are no such men nor can there be. He is wise who makes not very serious mistakes and knows how to correct them easily and quickly.

return you are spared the pleasant company of the bandits. That is a compromise beyond all doubt. *"Do ut des"* ("I give" you money, firearms, automobile, "so that you give" me the opportunity to depart in peace). But it would be difficult to find a sane man who would declare such a compromise to be "inadmissible on principle," or would proclaim the compromiser an accomplice of the bandits (even though the bandits, having got into the automobile, might use it and the firearms for new robberies). Our compromise with the bandits of German imperialism was such a compromise.

But when the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia, the Scheidemannists (and, to a large extent, the Kautskyists) in Germany, Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler (let alone Renner and Co.) in Austria, the Renaudels and Longuet and Co. in France, the Fabians, the "Independents" and the "Labourites" in England, in 1914-1918 and in 1918-1920, entered into *compromises* with the bandits of their own bourgeoisie, and sometimes with those of the bourgeoisie of the "Allies," *against* the revolutionary proletariat of their own country, all these gentlemen acted as *accomplices in banditry.*

The conclusion to be drawn, is clear: To reject compromises "on principle," to reject the admissibility of compromises in general, no matter of what kind, is a piece of childishness that is even difficult to take seriously. A statesman, desirous of being useful to the revolutionary proletariat, must know how to single out *concrete* cases of precisely such compromises as are inadmissible, as express opportunism and *treachery,* and to direct all the force of his criticism, the spearhead of merciless exposure and of irreconcilable war, against *those concrete* compromises, and prevent the experienced "practical" Socialists and parliamentary Jesuits from dodging and wriggling out of responsibility by resorting to arguments about "compromises in general." It is precisely in this way that Messieurs the "leaders" of the British trade unions, as well as of the Fabian Society and the "Independent" Labour Party, dodge responsibility *for the treachery they perpetrated,* for committing *such* a compromise which really expresses the worst kind of opportunism, treachery and betrayal.

There are compromises and compromises. One must be able to analyse the situation and the concrete conditions of each compromise or of each form of compromise. One must learn to distinguish between the man who gave the bandits money and firearms, in order to lessen the evil committed by the bandits and to facilitate the task of

capturing and shooting them, and the man who gives bandits money and firearms in order to share in the bandits' loot. It is not always possible in politics to do this so easily as in this childishly simple little example. But any one who wanted to invent a recipe for the workers that would provide ready-made solutions for all cases that occur in life, or who promised that the politics of the revolutionary proletariat would never encounter difficult or intricate situations, would simply be a charlatan.

So as to leave no room for misinterpretation, I shall attempt to outline very briefly a few fundamental rules for analysing concrete compromises.

The Party which committed the compromise of signing the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with the German imperialists had been working out its own internationalism in deeds since the end of 1914. It was not afraid to proclaim the defeat of the tsarist monarchy and to stigmatise "defence of the fatherland" in war between two imperialist plunderers. The members of this Party in the Duma took the road to exile in Siberia rather than the road leading to ministerial portfolios in a bourgeois government. The revolution, which overthrew tsarism and established the democratic republic, put the Party to a new and tremendous test; the Party did not enter into any agreements with "its own" imperialists, but prepared their overthrow and did overthrow them. After taking political power, this Party did not leave a vestige either of landlord or capitalist property. Having published and repudiated the secret treaties of the imperialists, this Party proposed peace to *all* the nations, and yielded to the violence of the Brest-Litovsk plunderers only after the Anglo-French imperialists had prevented peace, and after the Bolsheviks had done everything humanly possible to hasten the revolution in Germany and other countries. The complete correctness of such a compromise, committed by such a Party, under such circumstances, becomes clearer and more evident to every one every day.

The Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia (like all the leaders of the Second International throughout the world in 1914-1920) began with treachery by directly or indirectly justifying the "defence of the Fatherland," that is, the defence of *their own* predatory bourgeoisie. They continued their treachery by entering into a coalition with the bourgeoisie of *their own* country and fighting together with *their own* bourgeoisie against the revolutionary proletariat of their own country. Their *bloc,* first with Kerensky

and the Cadets,* then with Kolchak and Denikin, in Russia. like the *bloc* of their *confrères* abroad with the bourgeoisie of *their* respective countries, was desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. From beginning to end *their* compromise with the bandits of imperialism lay in the fact that they made themselves *accomplices* in imperialist banditry.

V

"Left" Communism in Germany: Leaders—Party—Class —Masses

The German Communists, of whom we must now speak, call themselves not "Left," but, if I am not mistaken, the "opposition on principle." That they exhibit all the symptoms of the "infantile disorder of Leftism" will be seen from what follows.

A pamphlet, written from the standpoint of this opposition and entitled *The Split in the Communist Party of Germany* (*the Spartacus League*), issued by "the local group in Frankfurt-am-Main," sets forth concisely, clearly, briefly, and in highest relief the substance of the views of this opposition. A few quotations will suffice to acquaint the reader with the essential points:

> The Communist Party is the party of the most determined class struggle. . . . . . . Politically, this transition period (between capitalism and socialism) is the period of the proletarian dictatorship. . . .
>
> The question arises: Who should be the vehicle of this dictatorship, the *Communist Party or the Proletarian Class?* . . . Should we, *on principle,* strive towards the dictatorship of the Communist Party or the dictatorship of the proletarian class? . . . (All italics in the original.)

Further, the author of the pamphlet accuses the "C. C." ** of the Communist Party of Germany of seeking a way to a *coalition* with the *Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany*, of putting to the fore "the question of recognising in principle all political means" of struggle, including parliamentarism, only for the purpose of concealing its main and real intention, *viz.*, coalition with the Independents. And he goes on to say:

* Abbreviated name of the Constitutional Democratic Party, the party of the Liberal bourgeoisie.—*Ed.*

** Central Committee.—*Ed.*

The opposition has chosen another road. It is of the opinion that the question of the rule of the Communist Party and of its dictatorship is only a question of tactics. At all events, the rule of the Communist Party is the final form of all party rule. *On principle,* we must strive towards the dictatorship of the proletarian class. And all Party measures, its organisation, methods of struggle, its strategy and tactics should be adapted to this end. Accordingly, it is necessary to reject most decisively all compromise with other parties, all reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle, which have become historically and politically obsolete, all policy of manœuvring and compromise. . . . Specifically proletarian methods of revolutionary struggle must be strongly emphasised. In order to embrace the broadest proletarian circles and strata, which will have to take part in the revolutionary struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party, there must be created new forms of organisation upon the broadest foundations and within the widest limits. The rallying point for all revolutionary elements is the *Workers' Union,* which is built up on the basis of factory organisations. In this union all workers must unite who followed the slogan, "Leave the trade unions!" Here the fighting proletariat is being formed into the broadest battle ranks. Recognition of the class struggle, the Soviet system, and the dictatorship is sufficient for admittance. All further political training of the fighting masses and political orientation in the struggle is the task of the Communist Party, which is outside the Workers' Union.

Consequently, two Communist Parties are arrayed one against the other:

One, a party of leaders, which strives to organise the revolutionary struggle and direct it *from above,* which resorts to compromises and parliamentarism, in order to create a situation which would enable it to enter a coalition government in whose hands the dictatorship would rest.

The other is a mass party, which relies upon the upsurge of the revolutionary struggle *from below,* which knows and employs but a single method in the struggle, a method that leads clearly to the goal, and which rejects all parliamentary and opportunist methods. This single method is the method of the unequivocal *overthrow of the bourgeoisie,* for the purpose of establishing the proletarian class dictatorship, for the realisation of socialism. . . .

. . . There—the dictatorship of leaders; here—the dictatorship of the masses: —this is our slogan.

Such are the most essential postulates that characterise the views of the opposition in the German Communist Party.

Any Bolshevik who has consciously participated in, or has closely observed, the development of Bolshevism since 1903 will at once say after reading these arguments: "What old and familiar rubbish! What 'Left' childishness!"

But let us look at these arguments a little more closely.

The very presentation of the question—"dictatorship of the Party *or* dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders *or* dictatorship (Party) of the masses?"—is evidence of the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind. People try very hard to *invent* something extraordinary, and in their effort to be wise they become ridiculous. Every one knows that the masses are divided

into classes; that masses can be contrasted to classes only by contrasting the overwhelming majority in general, without dividing them according to their position in the social system of production, to categories occupying a definite position in the social system of production; that in modern civilised countries at least, classes are usually, and in the majority of cases, led by political parties; that political parties, as a general rule, are directed by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential, and experienced members who are elected to the most responsible positions and are called leaders. All this is ABC. All this is simple and clear. What was the use then, in place of this, of all this rigmarole, this new Volapük? * Apparently, on the one hand, these people got confused in a serious situation in which the rapid alternation of legal and illegal existence of the Party disturbs the usual normal, simple relations between leaders, parties, and classes. In Germany, as in other European countries, people had become too much accustomed to legality, to the free and regular election of "leaders" at regular Party conventions, to convenient methods of testing the class composition of the Party by parliamentary elections, meetings, the press, the mood of the trade unions and other organisations, etc. When, instead of this customary procedure, it became necessary, in consequence of the extremely rapid advance of the revolution and the spread of civil war, to change quickly from legality to illegality, to combine the two, and adopt "inconvenient" and "undemocratic" methods of singling out or constituting or preserving "groups of leaders"—people lost their heads and began to invent supernatural nonsense. Probably the Dutch "Tribunists"—who had the misfortune to be born in a small country with traditions, and under conditions of particularly privileged and stable legality, who had never experienced the change from legality to illegality—became confused, lost their heads, and helped these absurd inventions.

On the other hand, we note here simply a thoughtless and incoherent use of the now "fashionable" terms "masses" and "leaders." People heard and became accustomed to attacks on "leaders," to their being contrasted to "the masses"; but they were not able to think and explain to themselves what it was all about. The divergence between "leaders" and "masses" revealed itself with particular clarity and sharpness in all countries at the end of and after the

* A universal language invented in 1879 by Johann M. Schleyer of Constance, Baden.—*Ed.*

imperialist war. The principal cause of this phenomenon was explained many times by Marx and Engels in 1852-1892 by the example of England. The monopoly position of England caused a semi-petty-bourgeois, opportunist "labour aristocracy" to be singled out from among the "masses." The leaders of this labour aristocracy constantly deserted to the side of the bourgeoisie, and were directly or indirectly in its pay. To his honour, Marx roused the hatred of these scoundrels by openly branding them as traitors. Modern (twentieth century) imperialism has created a privileged monopoly position for a few advanced countries, and this gave rise everywhere in the Second International to a certain type of leader-traitors, opportunists, social-chauvinists, who look after their own craft interests, the interests of their own stratum of the labour aristocracy. This caused the opportunist parties to become isolated from "the masses," that is, from the broadest strata of the toilers, from the majority, from the lowest-paid workers. The victory of the revolutionary proletariat is impossible unless this evil is combated, unless the opportunist, social-traitor leaders are exposed, discredited, and expelled. This is the policy that was pursued by the Third International.

To go so far in this matter as to draw a contrast in general between the dictatorship of the masses and the dictatorship of the leaders, is ridiculously absurd and stupid. What is particularly funny is that actually, in place of the old leaders who hold commonsense views on ordinary matters, *new leaders* are put forth (under cover of the slogan, "Down with the leaders!") who talk supernatural nonsense and confusion. Such are Lauffenberg, Wolffheim, Horner, Karl Schröder, Friedrich Wendel, and Karl Erler *

* Karl Erler, "Die Auflösung der Partei" ["The Dissolution of the Party"] in *Kommunistische Arbeiterzeitung*, Hamburg, February 7, 1920, No. 32: "The working class cannot destroy the bourgeois state without destroying bourgeois democracy, and it cannot destroy bourgeois democracy *without destroying parties.*"

The most muddle-headed among the syndicalists and anarchists of the Latin countries may enjoy a certain amount of satisfaction: serious Germans, who evidently consider themselves Marxists (K. Erler, K. Horner, who in their articles in the above-mentioned paper very seriously maintain that they are serious Marxists, are talking incredible nonsense in a particularly ridiculous manner, revealing their lack of understanding of the ABC of Marxism), go so far as to make entirely inept statements. The mere acceptance of Marxism does not save one from mistakes. We Russians know this particularly well, because, in our country, Marxism was most frequently "in fashion."

in Germany. The attempts of the latter to make the question "more profound" and to proclaim that political parties in general are unnecessary and "bourgeois," are such Herculean pillars of absurdity that one can only shrug one's shoulders. In truth, a small mistake can always be transformed into a monstrously big one, if the small mistake is persisted in, if profound reasons are given for it and if it is carried to its "logical conclusion."

Repudiation of party and of party discipline—this is what the opposition *amounts to.* And this is tantamount to completely disarming the proletariat for *the benefit of the bourgeoisie.* It is the equivalent to precisely that petty-bourgeois diffuseness, instability, incapacity for sustained effort, unity and organised action, which, if indulged in, must inevitably destroy every proletarian revolutionary movement. From the standpoint of communism, repudiation of party means leaping from the eve of the collapse of capitalism (in Germany), not to the initial, or middle, but to the highest phase of communism. We in Russia (in the third year after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie) are taking the first steps in the transition from capitalism to socialism, or the lowest stage of communism. Everywhere, classes have remained and will remain *for years after* the conquest of power by the proletariat. Perhaps in England, where there is no peasantry (but where, nevertheless, there are small proprietors!), the period will be shorter. The abolition of classes not only means driving out the landlords and capitalists—that we accomplished with comparative ease—it means also getting *rid of the small commodity producers,* and they *cannot be driven out* or crushed; we must live *in harmony* with them; they can (and must) be remoulded and re-educated, but this can be done only by very prolonged, slow, cautious organisational work. They encircle the proletariat on every side with a petty-bourgeois atmosphere, which impregnates and corrupts the proletariat and causes constant relapses among the proletariat into petty-bourgeois spinelessness, disintegration, individualism and alternate moods of exaltation and dejection. The strictest centralisation and discipline is required in the political party of the proletariat in order to counteract this, in order that the *organisational* rôle of the proletariat (*and* this is its *principal* rôle) may be fulfilled correctly, successfully, victoriously. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a persistent struggle—sanguinary and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative—against the forces and traditions of the old so-

ciety. The force of habit of millions and of tens of millions is a terrible force. Without an iron party steeled in the struggle, without a party enjoying the confidence of all who are honest in the given class, without a party capable of keeping track of and influencing the mood of the masses, it is impossible to conduct such a struggle successfully. It is a thousand times easier to vanquish the centralised big bourgeoisie than to "vanquish" millions and millions of small proprietors, who by their everyday, imperceptible, elusive, demoralising activity achieve the *very* results desired by the bourgeoisie and which *restore* the bourgeoisie. Whoever in the least weakens the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during its dictatorship) actually aids the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

Side by side with the question of leaders—party—class—masses, it is necessary to raise the question of the "reactionary" trade unions. But first I shall take the liberty of making a few concluding remarks based upon the experience of our Party. There *have always been* attacks upon the "dictatorship of leaders" in our Party. The first time I remember hearing such attacks was in 1895, when, as yet, no party formerly existed, and when a central group began to be formed in St. Petersburg which had to undertake the leadership over the district groups. At the Ninth Congress of our Party (April 1920) there was a small opposition, which also spoke against the "dictatorship of leaders," against the "oligarchy," and so on. There is, therefore, nothing surprising, nothing new, nothing terrible in the "infantile disorder" of "Left Communism" among the Germans. It is not a dangerous illness, and after it the constitution becomes stronger than ever. On the other hand, in our case the rapid change from legal to illegal work, which made it particularly necessary to "conceal," to cloak in particular secrecy the General Staff, the leaders, sometimes gave rise to extremely dangerous phenomena. The worst was in 1912, when an *agent-provocateur*, Malinovsky, got into the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks. He betrayed scores and scores of the best and most loyal comrades, caused them to be sent to penal servitude and hastened the death of many of them. The fact that he did not cause even more harm than he did was due to the fact that we had established proper co-ordination between our legal and illegal work. As a member of the Central Committee of the Party and a deputy in the Duma, Malinovsky was forced, in order to gain our confidence, to aid us in establishing legal daily

papers, which even under the Tsar were able to carry on the struggle against the opportunism of the Mensheviks and to preach the fundamentals of Bolshevism in a properly disguised form. While with one hand Malinovsky sent scores and scores of the most active Bolsheviks to penal servitude and to death, with the other he was compelled to aid in the education of scores and scores of thousands of new Bolsheviks through the medium of the legal press. It will not harm those German (as well as English, American, French, and Italian) comrades, who are confronted with the task of learning how to carry on revolutionary work inside the reactionary trade unions, to consider this fact seriously.*

In many countries, including the most advanced, undoubtedly the bourgeoisie is now sending, and will continue to send, *agents-provocateurs* into the Communist Parties. One method of combating this peril is the skilful co-ordination of legal and illegal work.

VI

Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?

The German "Lefts" consider the reply to this question to be decidedly in the negative so far as they are concerned. In their opinion, declamations and angry ejaculations (as uttered by K. Horner in a particularly "solid" and particularly stupid manner) against "reactionary" and "counter-revolutionary" trade unions are sufficient to prove that it is futile and even impermissible for revolutionaries and Communists to work in yellow, social-chauvinist, conciliatory, counter-revolutionary trade unions of the type of the Legien unions.

But however strongly the German "Lefts" may be convinced of the

* Malinovsky was a prisoner of war in Germany. When he returned to Russia, which was under the rule of the Bolsheviks, he was instantly put on trial and shot by our workers. The Mensheviks attacked us most bitterly for our mistake in allowing an *agent-provocateur* to become a member of the Central Committee of our Party. But when, under Kerensky, we demanded the arrest and trial of Rodzyanko, the Speaker of the Duma—because he had known even before the war that Malinovsky was an *agent-provocateur* and *had not informed* the "Trudoviks" [peasant deputies.—*Ed.*] in the Duma and the workers of this fact—the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries who were in Kerensky's Cabinet did not support our demand, and Rodzyanko retained his freedom and went off, without hindrance, to Denikin.

revolutionism of such tactics, they are in fact fundamentally wrong, and contain nothing but empty phrases.

In order to make this clear, I shall begin with our own experience —in conformity with the general plan of the present article, the object of which is to apply to western Europe whatever is of general application, general significance, and general validity in the history and the present tactics of Bolshevism.

The interrelations between leaders—Party—class—masses, as well as the relation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its Party to the trade unions, now present themselves concretely in Russia in the following form. The dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat which is organised in the Soviets and is led by the Communist Party (Bolsheviks), which, according to the data of the last Party Congress (April 1920), has 611,000 members. Membership fluctuated considerably both before and after the October Revolution, and even in 1918 and 1919 was considerably less than it is now. We are afraid of an excessive growth of the Party, as careerists and charlatans, who deserve only to be shot, inevitably strive to attach themselves to the ruling party. The last time we opened wide the doors of the Party—for workers and peasants only—was in the days (winter, 1919) when Yudenich was a few versts * from Petrograd and Denikin was in Orel (about 350 versts from Moscow), that is, when the Soviet Republic was in desperate, mortal danger, and when adventurers, careerists, charlatans and unreliable persons in general could not possibly count on making a profitable career (they had more reason to expect the gallows and torture) by joining the Communists. The Party, which holds annual congresses (the last on the basis of one delegate for each 1,000 members), is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen elected at the congress, while the current work in Moscow has to be carried on by still smaller bodies, *viz.*, the so-called "Orgburo" (Organisation Bureau) and "Politburo" (Political Bureau), which are elected at the plenary sessions of the Central Committee, five members of the Central Committee in each bureau. This, then, looks like a real "oligarchy." Not a single important political or organisational question is decided by any state institution in our republic without the guiding instructions of the Central Committee of the Party.

In its work the Party relies directly on the *trade unions*, which, at

* A *verst*—two-thirds of a mile.—*Ed.*

present, according to the data of the last congress (April 1920), have over 4,000,000 members, and which, formally, are *non-Party*. In reality, all the controlling bodies of the overwhelming majority of the unions, and primarily, of course, of the All-Russian general trade union centre or bureau (All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions) consist of Communists, who secure the carrying out of all the instructions of the Party. Thus, on the whole, we have a formally non-Communist, flexible, relatively wide, and very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the Party is closely linked up with the *class* and with *the masses*, and by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the *class dictatorship* of the class is realised. Without close contact with the trade unions, without their hearty support and self-sacrificing work not only in economic *but also in military* construction, it would, of course, have been impossible to govern the country and to maintain the dictatorship for two months, let alone two years. Of course, in practice, this close contact calls for very complicated and varied work in the form of propaganda, agitation, timely and frequent conferences not only with the leading but also with the influential trade union workers generally; it calls for determined struggle against the Mensheviks, who still have a certain, though very small, number of adherents, whom they teach all possible counter-revolutionary tricks, from the ideological defence of (*bourgeois*) democracy and the preaching of the "independence" of the trade unions (independence—from the proletarian state!) to the sabotaging of proletarian discipline, etc., etc.

We consider that contact with the "masses" through trade unions is not enough. Our practical experience during the course of the revolution has given rise to *non-Party workers' and peasants' conferences*, and we strive by every means to support, develop, and extend these institutions in order to be able to watch the mood of the masses, to come closer to them, to respond to their demands, to promote the best of their workers to state posts, etc. In a recent decree on the transformation of the People's Commissariat for State Control into the Workers' and Peasants' inspection non-Party conferences of this kind are granted the right to elect members of the State Control to undertake various investigations, etc.

Then, of course, all the work of the Party is carried on through the Soviets, which unite the toiling masses irrespective of occupation.

The Uyezd * congresses of Soviets are institutions *more democratic* than any in the best democratic republics of the bourgeois world; and through these congresses (whose proceedings are followed by the Party with the closest attention), as well as by continuously sending class-conscious workers to various posts in the rural districts, the rôle of the proletariat as leader of the peasantry is fulfilled, the dictatorship of the urban proletariat is realised and systematic struggle against the bourgeois, rich, exploiting and profiteering peasantry is waged.

Such is the general mechanism of the proletarian state power viewed "from above," from the standpoint of the practical realisation of the dictatorship. It is to be hoped that the reader will understand why, to a Russian Bolshevik well acquainted with this mechanism and who for twenty-five years has watched its growth from small, illegal, underground circles, all talk about "from above" *or* "from below," about "the dictatorship of leaders" *or* "the dictatorship of the masses," cannot but appear to be ridiculous, childish nonsense, something like discussing whether the left leg or the right arm is more useful to man.

And we cannot but consider the ponderous, highly learned and frightfully revolutionary disquisitions of the German Lefts on why Communists cannot and should not work in reactionary trade unions, why it is permissible to refuse to do such work, why it is necessary to leave the trade unions and to create in their stead brand new, simon-pure "Workers' Unions," invented by exceedingly nice (and, for the most part, probably very youthful) Communists, etc., etc., to be equally ridiculous and childish nonsense.

Capitalism inevitably leaves to Socialism a heritage of old trade and craft distinctions among the workers created in the course of centuries, and trade unions which only very slowly and in the course of years can and will develop into broader, industrial unions having much less of the craft union about them (embracing whole industries, not merely crafts and trades). Later these industrial unions will, in their turn, lead to the abolition of division of labour among people, to the education, training and preparation of people who will have an *all-round* development, an *all-round* training, people who *will be able to do everything*. Towards this goal communism is

* County.—*Ed.*

marching, and must march, and it must reach it—but only after very many years. To attempt in practice to-day to anticipate this future result of a fully developed, fully stabilised and formed, fully expanded and mature communism would be like trying to teach higher mathematics to a four year old child.

We can (and must) begin to build up socialism not with the fantastic human material especially created by our imagination but with the material bequeathed us by capitalism. This, no doubt, is very "difficult," but any other approach to this task is not serious enough to deserve discussion.

Trade unions represented a gigantic step forward for the working class at the beginning of the development of capitalism, as the transition from the disintegration and helplessness of the workers to the *rudiments* of a class organisation. When the *highest* form of proletarian class organisation began to arise, *viz.*, the *revolutionary Party of the proletariat* (which does not deserve the name until it learns to bind the leaders with the class and with the masses into one single indissoluble whole), the trade unions inevitably began to reveal *certain* reactionary traits, a certain craft narrowness, a certain tendency towards becoming non-political, a certain inertness, etc. But the development of the proletariat did not and could not, anywhere in the world, proceed otherwise than through the trade unions, through their inter-action with the Party of the working class. The conquest of political power by the proletariat is a gigantic step forward for the proletariat as a class, and the Party must more and more than ever, and in a new way, not merely in the old way, educate and guide the trade unions; at the same time it must not forget that they are, and will long remain, a necessary "school of communism," a preparatory school for training the proletariat to exercise its dictatorship, an indispensable organisation of the workers for gradually transferring the management of the whole economy of the country to the hands of the working *class* (and not of the separate trades) and later to the hands of all the toiling masses.

A *certain* "reactionism" in the trade unions, in the sense mentioned, is *inevitable* under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Not to understand this means to fail completely to understand the fundamental conditions of the *transition* from capitalism to socialism. To fear *this* "reactionism," to try to *avoid* it or skip it, is the greatest folly, for it means fearing to assume the rôle of proletarian vanguard which implies training, educating, enlightening and attract-

ing into the new life the most backward strata and masses of the working class and the peasantry. On the other hand, to postpone the realisation of the dictatorship of the proletariat until such time as not a single worker with narrow craft interests, not a single worker with guild and trade union prejudices is left, would be a still greater mistake. The art of statesmanship (and the correct understanding by a Communist of his tasks) lies in correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power, when it will be able during and after this seizure of power to obtain adequate support from sufficiently broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian toiling masses, and when, thereafter, it will be able to maintain, consolidate and extend its rule, educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the toilers.

Further: in countries more advanced than Russia a certain reactionism in the trade unions has been revealed, and was unquestionably bound to be revealed, much more strongly than in our country. Our Mensheviks found (and in a very few trade unions still find some) support in trade unions precisely because of their craft narrowness, craft egoism, and opportunism. In the West the Mensheviks have acquired a much firmer "footing" in the trade unions. There the *trade union* "labour aristocracy" constitutes a much thicker stratum of *narrow-minded, selfish, hard-hearted, covetous, petty-bourgeois elements—imperialistically-minded, bribed and corrupted by imperialism.* This is incontestable. The struggle against the Gomperses and Hendersons, against Jouhaux, Merrheim, Legien and Co. in western Europe, is much more difficult than the struggle against our Mensheviks, who represent an *absolutely similar* social and political type. This struggle must be waged ruthlessly to the very end, as we waged it, until all the incorrigible leaders of opportunism and social-chauvinism have been completely discredited and expelled from the trade unions. It is impossible to capture political power (and the attempt to capture it should not be made) until this struggle has reached a *certain* stage. Moreover, in different countries and under different circumstances this "certain stage" will not be the same; it can be correctly gauged only by thoughtful, experienced, and well-informed political leaders of the proletariat in each separate country. (In Russia, the measure of success in the struggle was gauged by the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November, 1917, a few days after the proletarian revolution of Novem-

ber 7, 1917. In these elections the Mensheviks were utterly defeated; they obtained 700,000 votes—1,400,000, if the vote of Transcaucasia be added—as against 9,000,000 votes obtained by the Bolsheviks. See my article, "Elections to the Constituent Assembly and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," in No. 7-8 of the *Communist International.*)

But we wage the struggle against the "labour aristocracy" in the name of the working masses and in order to attract the latter to our side; we wage the struggle against the opportunist and social-chauvinist leaders in order to attract the working class to our side. To forget this most elementary and self-evident truth would be stupid. But the German "Left" Communists are guilty of just this stupidity when, because of the reactionary and counter-revolutionary character of the *heads* of the trade unions, they jump to the conclusion that it is necessary to leave the trade unions, to refuse to work in them, to create new, *fantastic* forms of labour organisations!! This is an unpardonable blunder that would equal the greatest service the Communists could render the bourgeoisie. Our Mensheviks, like all opportunist, social-chauvinist, Kautskyist trade union leaders, are nothing more nor less than "agents of the bourgeoisie in the labour movement" (as we have always characterised the Mensheviks) or "labour lieutenants of the capitalist class" (to use the excellent and profoundly true expression of the followers of Daniel De Leon in America). To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward working masses under the influence of reactionary leaders, agents of the bourgeoisie, labour aristocrats, or "bourgeoisified workers." (See Engels' letter to Marx in 1852 concerning the British workers.)

It is just this absurd "theory" that Communists must not belong to reactionary trade unions that demonstrates most clearly how frivolously these "Left" Communists regard the question of influence over "the masses," how they misuse their outcries about "the masses." In order to be able to help "the masses" and to win the sympathy, confidence, and support of "the masses," it is necessary to brave all difficulties and to be unafraid of the pinpricks, obstacles, insults, and persecution of the "leaders" (who, being opportunists and social-chauvinists, are, in most cases, directly or indirectly connected with the bourgeoisie and the police), and it is imperatively necessary to *work wherever the masses are to be found.* Every sacrifice must be made, the greatest obstacles must be overcome, in order to

carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, stubbornly, insistently, and patiently, precisely in all those institutions, societies, and associations to which proletarian or semi-proletarian masses belong, however ultra-reactionary they may be. And the trade unions and workers' co-operatives (the latter, at least sometimes), are precisely the organisations in which the masses are to be found. In England, according to figures quoted in the Swedish paper, *Folkets Dagblad Politiken* of March 10, 1919, the membership of the trade unions increased from 5,500,000 at the end of 1917 to 6,600,000 at the end of 1918, *i.e.*, an increase of 19 per cent. At the end of 1919 the membership was 7,500,000. I have not at hand the corresponding figures for France and Germany, but the facts testifying to the rapid growth in membership of the trade unions in these countries as well are absolutely incontestable and generally known.

These facts very clearly indicate what is confirmed by thousands of other symptoms: the growth of class consciousness and of the desire for organisation precisely among the proletarian masses, among the "rank and file," among the backward elements. Millions of workers in England, France, and Germany are *for the first time* passing from complete lack of organisation to the lowest, most elementary, most simple, and (for those still thoroughly imbued with bourgeois-democratic prejudices) most easily accessible form of organisation, namely, the trade unions. And the revolutionary but foolish Left Communists stand by, shouting, "the masses, the masses!"—and *refuse to work within the trade unions,* refuse on the pretext that they are "reactionary," and invent a brand-new, pure "Workers' Union," guiltless of bourgeois-democratic prejudices, innocent of craft or narrow trade sins!! and which they claim, will be (will be!) a wide organisation, and the only (only!) condition of membership of which will be "recognition of the Soviet system and the dictatorship!!" (See the citation above.)

Greater stupidity, and greater damage to the revolution than that caused by the "Left" revolutionaries cannot be imagined! If, in Russia to-day, after two and a half years of unprecedented victories over the bourgeoisie of Russia and the Entente, we were to make the "recognition of the dictatorship" a condition of membership in the trade unions, we should be doing a stupid thing, we should damage our influence over the masses, we should be helping the Mensheviks. For the whole task of the Communists is to be able to *convince* the backward elements, to be able to work *among* them, and not to *fence*

themselves off from them by artificial and childishly "Left-wing" slogans.

There can be no doubt that Messieurs the Gomperses, Hendersons, Jouhaux, Legiens, and the like, are very grateful to such "Left" revolutionaries, who, like the German opposition "on principle" (heaven preserve us from such "principles!") or like some revolutionaries in the American Industrial Workers of the World, advocate leaving the reactionary trade unions and refusing to work in them. Undoubtedly, Messieurs the "leaders" of opportunism will resort to every trick of bourgeois diplomacy, to the aid of bourgeois governments, the priests, the police, and the courts, in order to prevent Communists from getting into the trade unions, to force them out by every means, to make their work in the trade unions as unpleasant as possible, to insult, to hound, and persecute them. It is necessary to be able to withstand all this, to agree to any and every sacrifice, and even—if need be—to resort to all sorts of devices, manœuvres, and illegal methods, to evasion and subterfuge, in order to penetrate into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on Communist work in them at all costs. Under tsarism, until 1905, we had no "legal possibilities," but when Zubatov, the secret service agent, organised Black Hundred * workers' meetings and workmen's societies for the purpose of trapping revolutionaries and combating them, we sent members of our Party to these meetings and into these societies. (I personally remember one such comrade, Babushkin, a prominent St. Petersburg workman, who was shot by the Tsar's generals in 1906.) They established contacts with the masses, managed to carry on their propaganda, and succeeded in wresting the workers from the influence of Zubatov's agents.** Of course, in western Europe, which is particularly saturated with inveterate legalist, constitutionalist, bourgeois-democratic prejudices, it is more difficult to carry on such work. But it can and must be carried on and carried on systematically.

The Executive Committee of the Third International must, in my opinion, directly condemn, and should call upon the next Congress of the Communist International to condemn, the policy of refusing

* Reactionary and Monarchist organisations.—*Ed.*

** The Gomperses, Hendersons, Jouhaux, and Legiens are nothing else than Zubatovs, different from our Zubatov only in their European dress, in their outer polish, in their civilised, refined, democratically sleek manner of conducting their despicable policy.

to join reactionary trade unions in general (stating in detail why this refusal to join is unreasonable and pointing out the extreme harm it does to the cause of the proletarian revolution) and, in particular, the line of conduct of the Dutch Tribunists, who, either directly or indirectly, openly or covertly, wholly or partially, supported this erroneous policy. The Third International must break with the tactics of the Second International and not evade or cover up sore points, but raise them bluntly. The whole truth has been put squarely to the "Independents" (Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany); the whole truth must likewise be told to the "Left" Communists.

VII

Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments?

The German "Left" Communists, very contemptuously, and very frivolously, reply to this question in the negative. Their arguments? In the passage quoted above we read:

> . . . to reject most decisively . . . all reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle, which have become historically and politically obsolete. . . .

This is said with absurd pretentiousness, and is obviously incorrect. "Reversion" to parliamentarism! Perhaps a Soviet Republic already exists in Germany? It does not seem so! How, then, is it possible to speak of "reversion"? Is not this an empty phrase?

Parliamentarism has become "historically obsolete." This is correct as regards propaganda. But every one knows that this is still very far from the *practical* overcoming of parliamentarism. Capitalism could have been rightly declared to be "historically obsolete" many decades ago, but this in no way removes the necessity of a very long and very stubborn struggle within capitalism. Parliamentarism is "historically obsolete" in a *world-historical* sense, that is to say, the *epoch* of bourgeois parliamentarism has come to an end, the *epoch* of the dictatorship of the proletariat has *begun*. This is incontestable. But on a world-historical scale one counts in decades. Ten or twenty years sooner or later makes no difference from the point of view of the world-historical scale; from the point of view of world history it is a trifle which cannot be even approximately cal-

culated. But precisely because of this it is a crying theoretical mistake to measure questions of practical politics on a world-historical scale.

Is parliamentarism "politically obsolete?" That is quite another matter. If this were true, the position of the "Lefts" would be a strong one. But it has got to be proved by the most searching analysis, and the "Lefts" do not even know how to set to work to do this. In the "Theses on Parliamentarism," published in No. 1 of the *Bulletin of the Amsterdam Provisional Bureau of the Communist International*, February 1920, which obviously expresses Dutch-Left or Left-Dutch strivings, the analysis, as we shall see, is also very bad.

In the first place, as is known, contrary to the opinion of such prominent political leaders as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the German "Lefts" considered parliamentarism to be "politically obsolete" as far back as January 1919. It is well known that the "Lefts" were mistaken. This alone at one stroke utterly destroys the proposition that parliamentarism is "politically obsolete." The obligation falls upon the "Lefts" to prove why their indisputable error at that time has now ceased to be an error. They do not, and cannot produce even the shadow of proof. The attitude of a political party towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest criteria of the seriousness of the party and of how it fulfils *in practice* its obligations towards its *class* and towards the toiling *masses*. To admit a mistake openly, to disclose its reasons, to analyse the conditions which gave rise to it, to study attentively the means of correcting it—these are the signs of a serious party; this means the performance of its duties, this means educating and training the *class*, and, subsequently, the *masses*. By their failure to fulfil this duty, by failing to give the utmost care, attention, and consideration to the study of their self-evident mistake, the "Lefts" in Germany (and in Holland) have proved that they are not a *class party* but a circle, not a *mass party* but a group of intellectuals and a few workers who imitate the worst features of intellectualism.

Secondly, in the same pamphlet of the Frankfurt group of "Lefts," that we have already cited in detail, we read:

> . . . the millions of workers who still follow the policy of the Centre (the Catholic 'Centre' Party) are counter-revolutionary. The rural proletarians produce legions of counter-revolutionary troops. (P. 3 of the above-mentioned pamphlet.)

It is quite clear that this statement is too sweeping and exaggerated. But the basic fact set forth is incontrovertible, and its acknowledgment by the "Lefts" very clearly testifies to their mistake. How can one say that "parliamentarism is politically obsolete," when "millions" and "legions" of *proletarians* are not only still in favour of parliamentarism in general but are downright "counter-revolutionary"? It is clear that parliamentarism in Germany is *not yet* politically obsolete. It is evident that the "Lefts" in Germany have mistaken *their desire*, their ideological-political attitude, for objective reality. This is the most dangerous mistake revolutionaries can make. In Russia—where the extremely fierce and savage yoke of tsarism for a particularly long period and in particularly varied forms produced revolutionaries of diverse shades, revolutionaries who displayed astonishing devotion, enthusiasm, heroism and will power—we watched this mistake of the revolutionaries particularly closely, studied it with particular attention, became particularly familiar with it, and hence, we can see it with particular clearness in others. For the Communists in Germany parliamentarism is, of course, "politically obsolete"; but—and this is the whole point—we must *not* regard that which is obsolete *for us as* obsolete *for the class*, as obsolete *for the masses*. It is precisely here that we see that the "Lefts" do not know how to reason, do not know how to conduct themselves as a party of the *class*, as a party of *the masses*. You must not sink to the level of the masses, to the level of the backward strata of the class. This is incontestable. You must tell them the bitter truth. You must call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices—prejudices. But, at the same time, you must *soberly* observe the *actual* state of class consciousness and preparedness of the *whole* class (not only of the Communist vanguard), of *all* the toiling *masses* (not only of its advanced elements).

Even if not "millions" and "legions" but a fairly significant *minority* of industrial workers follow the Catholic priests, and a like number of rural workers follow the landowners and kulaks (*Grossbauern*),* it undoubtedly follows that parliamentarism in Germany is *not yet* politically obsolete, that participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle in parliament is *obligatory* for the Party of the revolutionary proletariat, *precisely* for the purpose of educating the backward strata of *its own class*, precisely for the

* Rich peasants.—*Ed.*

purpose of awakening and enlightening the undeveloped, downtrodden, ignorant peasant *masses.* As long as you are unable to disperse the bourgeois parliament and every other type of reactionary institution, you *must* work inside them, *precisely* because in them there are still workers who are stupefied by the priests and by the desolateness of village life; otherwise you run the risk of becoming mere babblers.

Thirdly, the "Left" Communists have a great deal to say in praise of us Bolsheviks. One sometimes feels like telling them that it would be better if they praised us less and tried to understand more thoroughly the tactics of the Bolsheviks, to make themselves more familiar with these tactics. We took part in the elections to the Russian bourgeois parliament, the Constituent Assembly, in September-November, 1917. Were our tactics correct or not? If not, then it should be clearly stated and proved; this is essential for working out the correct tactics for international Communism. If they were correct, certain conclusions must be drawn. Of course, there can be no question of drawing a parallel between Russian conditions and the conditions of western Europe. But as regards the special question of the meaning of the concept "parliamentarism has become politically obsolete" it is absolutely necessary to take exact account of our experience, because unless concrete experience is taken into account, such concepts are very easily transformed into empty phrases. Had not we Russian Bolsheviks, in September-November 1917, more right than any western Communists to consider parliamentarism politically obsolete in Russia? Undoubtedly we had, for the point is *not* whether bourgeois parliaments have existed for a long or a short period, but to what extent the broad masses of the toilers are *prepared* (ideologically, politically, and practically) to accept the Soviet regime and to dissolve the bourgeois democratic parliament (or allow it to be dissolved. That the urban working class and the soldiers and peasants in Russia in September-November 1917, owing to a number of special conditions, were exceptionally well prepared for the acceptance of the Soviet régime and for the dissolution of the most democratic bourgeois parliament, is an absolutely incontestable and fully established historical fact. The Bolsheviks did *not* boycott the Constituent Assembly, however, but took part in the elections both before and *after* the conquest of political power by the proletariat. That these elections gave exceedingly valuable (and for the proletariat highly useful) political results I hope I have proved

in the above-mentioned article, which analyses in detail the figures of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Russia.

The conclusion which follows from this is absolutely incontrovertible: it has been proved that participation in a bourgeois-democratic parliament even a few weeks before the victory of a Soviet Republic, and even *after* that victory, not only does not harm the revolutionary proletariat but actually makes it easier for it to *prove* to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be dissolved, *facilitates* their dissolution, and *facilitates* the process whereby bourgeois parliamentarism becomes "politically obsolete." To refuse to take this experience into account and at the same time to claim affiliation to the Communist *International*, which must work out its tactics *internationally* (not narrow or one-sided national tactics but international tactics), is to commit the greatest blunder and actually to reject internationalism in deeds while accepting it in words.

Now let us examine the "Dutch-Left" arguments in favour of non-participation in parliaments. The following is the text of the most important of the above-mentioned "Dutch" theses, Thesis No. 4:

> When the capitalist system of production has broken down and society is in a state of revolution, parliamentary activity gradually loses its significance as compared with the action of the masses themselves. When, under these conditions, parliament becomes a centre and organ of counter-revolution, while, on the other hand, the working class is creating the instruments of its power in the form of Soviets, it may even become necessary to abstain from all participation in parliamentary activity.

The first sentence is obviously wrong, since the action of the masses—a big strike, for instance—is more important than parliamentary activity at *all* times and not only during a revolution or in a revolutionary situation. This obviously untenable and historically and politically incorrect argument only shows in a particularly striking manner that the authors absolutely ignore both the general European experience (the French experience before the Revolutions of 1848 and 1870; the German experience from 1878 to 1890, etc.), and the Russian experience (see above) of the importance of *combining* the legal and illegal struggle. This question has immense significance, both general and specific, since in *all* civilised and advanced countries the time is rapidly approaching when such a combination will become—and partly has already become—more and more obligatory for the Party of the revolutionary proletariat owing

to the maturing and approach of civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, owing to the fierce persecution of the Communists by republican and by bourgeois governments generally which are prepared to resort to all sorts of violations of legality (how much is the American example * alone worth?), etc. The Dutch and the Lefts in general have utterly failed to understand this very important question.

As for the second sentence, in the first place, it is wrong historically. We Bolsheviks took part in the most counter-revolutionary parliaments, and experience has shown that such participation was not only useful but necessary to the Party of the revolutionary proletariat precisely after the first bourgeois revolution in Russia (1905), for the purpose of preparing the way for the second bourgeois revolution (March [February] 1917), and then for the socialist revolution (November [October] 1917). In the second place, this sentence is amazingly illogical. If parliament becomes an organ and a "centre," (by the way, in reality it never has been and never can be a "centre,") of counter-revolution, and the workers are creating the instruments of their power in the form of Soviets, it logically follows that the workers must prepare—ideologically, politically and technically—for the struggle of the Soviets against parliament, for the dissolution of parliament by the Soviets. But it does not at all follow that such dissolution is hindered, or is not facilitated, by the presence of a Soviet opposition *within* the counter-revolutionary parliament. During the course of our victorious struggle against Denikin and Kolchak we never noticed that the existence of a Soviet, proletarian opposition in their midst, was immaterial for our victories. We know perfectly well that we were not hindered but assisted in dissolving the Constituent Assembly on January 18, 1918, by the fact that within the counter-revolutionary Constituent Assembly which was being dissolved there was a consistent Bolshevik, as well as an inconsistent Left Socialist-Revolutionary, Soviet opposition. The authors of the theses have become utterly confused and they have forgotten the experience of many, if not all, revolutions, which proves how particularly useful during a revolution is the co-ordination of mass action outside a reactionary parliament with an

* The raids upon Communist organisations and their persecution conducted on a national scale early in 1920 under the direction of Attorney-General Palmer of the Wilson Administration, usually referred to as the Palmer raids.—*Ed.*

opposition inside this parliament which sympathises with (or better still directly supports) the revolution. The Dutch, and the "Lefts" in general, argue like doctrinaire revolutionaries who have never taken part in a real revolution or have never deeply pondered over the history of revolutions, or naïvely mistake the subjective "rejection" of a certain reactionary institution for its actual destruction by the united forces of a whole series of objective factors.

The surest way of discrediting a new political (and not only political) idea, and to damage it, is to reduce it to an absurdity while ostensibly defending it. For every truth, if carried to "excess" (as Dietzgen Senior said), if it is exaggerated, if it is carried beyond the limits within which it can be actually applied, can be reduced to absurdity, and, under the conditions mentioned, is even inevitably converted into an absurdity. This is just the kind of back-handed service the Dutch and German Lefts are rendering the new truth about the superiority of the Soviet form of government over bourgeois-democratic parliaments. Of course, any one who would say in the old way and in general that refusal to participate in bourgeois parliaments is under no circumstances permissible, would be wrong. I cannot attempt to formulate here the conditions under which a boycott is useful, for the task of this treatise is far more modest, namely, to study Russian experience in connection with certain topical questions of international Communist tactics. Russian experience has given us one successful and correct (1905) and one incorrect (1906) example of the application of the boycott by the Bolsheviks. Analysing the first case, we see that we succeeded in *preventing the convocation* of a reactionary parliament by a reactionary government in a situation in which extra-parliamentary, revolutionary mass action (strikes in particular) was growing with exceptional rapidity, when not a single stratum of the proletariat or of the peasantry could support the reactionary government, when the revolutionary proletariat was acquiring influence over the broad, backward masses by means of the strike struggle and the agrarian movement. It is quite obvious that *this* experience is not applicable to present-day European conditions. It is also quite obvious, on the strength of the foregoing arguments, that even a conditional defence of the refusal to participate in parliaments by the Dutch and other "Lefts," is fundamentally wrong and harmful to the cause of the revolutionary proletariat.

In western Europe and America parliament has become an object

of special hatred to the advanced revolutionaries of the working class. This is incontestable and quite comprehensible, for it is difficult to imagine anything more base, abominable and treacherous than the behaviour of the overwhelming majority of Socialist and Social-Democratic deputies in parliament during and after the war. But it would be not only unreasonable but actually criminal to yield to this mood when deciding the question of *how* to fight against this generally recognised evil. In many countries of western Europe the revolutionary mood is at present, we might say, a "novelty," a "rarity," for which we have been vainly and impatiently waiting for a long time, and perhaps that is why we so easily give way to moods. Of course, without a revolutionary mood among the masses, and without conditions favouring the growth of this mood, revolutionary tactics will never be converted into action; but we in Russia have been convinced by long, painful and bloody experience of the truth that revolutionary tactics cannot be built up on revolutionary moods alone. Tactics must be based on a sober and strictly objective estimation of *all* the class forces in a given State (in neighbouring states and in all states, *i.e.*, on a world scale), as well as on an evaluation of the experience of revolutionary movements. To express one's "revolutionism" solely by hurling abuse at parliamentary opportunism, solely by refusing to participate in parliaments, is very easy; but, just because it is too easy, it is not the solution of a difficult, a very difficult, problem. It is much more difficult to create a really revolutionary parliamentary fraction in a European parliament than it was in Russia. Of course. But this is only a particular expression of the general truth that it was easy for Russia, in the concrete, historically exceedingly unique, situation of 1917, *to start* a Socialist revolution, but that it will be more difficult for Russia to *continue* and bring it to its consummation than for the European countries. Even in the beginning of 1918 I had occasion to point this out, and our experience of the last two years has entirely confirmed the correctness of this argument. Certain specific conditions existed in Russia which do not at present exist in western Europe, and a repetition of these or similar conditions is not very probable. These specific conditions were: (1) the possibility of linking up the Soviet Revolution with the ending (as a consequence of this revolution) of the imperialist war, which had exhausted the workers and peasants to an incredible degree; (2) the possibility of taking advantage, for a certain time, of the mortal conflict between two world-powerful

groups of imperialist plunderers, who were unable to unite against their Soviet enemy; (3) the possibility of holding out in a comparatively lengthy civil war, owing partly to the gigantic dimensions of the country and the poor means of communication; (4) the existence of such a profound bourgeois-democratic revolutionary movement among the peasantry that the Party of the proletariat was able to adopt the revolutionary demands of the peasant party (the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, a party which, in the main, was very hostile to Bolshevism) and at once realise them, thanks to the conquest of political power by the proletariat. The absence of these specific conditions—not to mention a number of other causes—accounts for the fact that it will be more difficult *to start* a socialist revolution in western Europe than it was in Russia. To attempt to "circumvent" this difficulty by "skipping" the difficult task of utilising reactionary parliaments for revolutionary purposes is absolutely childish. You wish to create a new society, and yet you fear the difficulties involved in forming in a reactionary parliament a good parliamentary fraction consisting of convinced, devoted, heroic Communists! Is not this childish? If Karl Liebknecht in Germany and Z. Höglund in Sweden were able, even without the support of the masses from below, to give examples of a truly revolutionary utilisation of reactionary parliaments, why, then, should a rapidly growing revolutionary mass party, under the conditions of the post-war disillusionment and exasperation of the masses, be unable to *forge* for itself a Communist fraction in the worst of parliaments? It is just because the backward masses of the workers and, to a still greater degree, of the small peasants in western Europe are much more strongly imbued with bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices than they are in Russia that it is *only* within such institutions as bourgeois parliaments that Communists can (and must) wage a long and stubborn struggle—undaunted by difficulties—to expose, dispel and overcome these prejudices.

The German "Lefts" complain of bad "leaders" in their party, give way to despair, and go to the length of ridiculously "rejecting leaders." But when conditions are such that it is often necessary to hide "leaders" underground, the *development* of good, reliable, experienced and authoritative "leaders" is an especially hard task, and these difficulties *cannot* be successfully overcome without combining legal with illegal work, *without testing the "leaders," among other ways, also* on the parliamentary arena. Criticism—the sharpest,

most ruthless, uncompromising criticism—must be directed, not against parliamentarism or parliamentary action, but against those leaders who are unable—and still more against those who *do not wish*—to utilise parliamentary elections and the parliamentary tribune in a revolutionary manner, in a Communist manner. Only such criticism—combined, of course, with the expulsion of worthless leaders and their replacement by capable ones—will constitute useful and fruitful revolutionary work that will simultaneously train the "leaders" themselves to become worthy of the working class and of the toiling masses, and will train the masses to be able properly to understand the political situation and the very complicated and intricate tasks that often spring from that situation.*

VIII

"No Compromises?"

In the quotation from the Frankfurt pamphlet we saw how emphatically the "Lefts" advance this slogan. It is sad to see that men who doubtless consider themselves to be Marxists, and who want to be Marxists, have forgotten the fundamental truths of Marxism. Let us cite what Engels—who, like Marx, was one of those rare

* I have had very little opportunity to make myself familiar with "Left" Communism in Italy. Comrade Bordiga and his group of "Communist-Boycottists" (*Comunista Astensionista*) are certainly wrong in defending non-participation in parliament. But on one point, it seems to me, Comrade Bordiga is right—as far as can be judged from two issues of his paper, *Il Soviet* (Nos. 3 and 4, January 18 and February 1, 1920), from four issues of Comrade Serrati's excellent periodical, *Comunismo* (Nos. 1-4, October 1—November 30, 1919), and from scattered numbers of Italian bourgeois papers which I have come across. Comrade Bordiga and his group are right in attacking Turati and his followers, who remain in a party which has recognised the Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat but who at the same time continue their former detrimental and opportunistic policy as members of parliament. Of course, in tolerating this, Comrade Serrati and the whole Italian Socialist Party make a mistake which threatens to do as much harm and give rise to the same dangers as it did in Hungary, where the Hungarian Turatis sabotaged both the Party and the Soviet government from within. Such a mistaken, inconsistent or spineless attitude towards the opportunist parliamentarians, on the one hand, creates "Left" Communism, and, on the other, justifies its existence to a certain extent. Comrade Serrati is obviously wrong when he accuses Deputy Turati of being "inconsistent" (*Comunismo*, No. 3), for it is really the Italian Socialist Party itself which is inconsistent, since it tolerates such opportunist parliamentarians as Turati and Co.

and very rare authors who in every sentence of every one of their great works, display remarkable profundity of content—wrote in 1874, in opposition to the Manifesto of the thirty-three Communards-Blanquists:

We are Communists [wrote the Communards-Blanquists in their Manifesto], because we wish to attain our goal without stopping at intermediary stations, without any compromises, which only postpone the day of victory and prolong the period of slavery.

The German Communists are Communists because, through all the intermediary stations and compromises, created not by them but by the course of historical development, they clearly discern and pursue the final goal: the abolition of classes and the creation of a social system in which there will no longer be private ownership of land and the means of production. The thirty-three Blanquists are Communists because they imagine that since *they* want to skip all the intermediary stations and compromises the thing is as good as done, and that if, as they are firmly convinced, things "will begin" in a few days and power will be in their hands, "Communism will be introduced" the day after to-morrow. Hence, if this is not immediately possible, they are not Communists.

What childish naïveté to put forward one's own impatience as a theoretically convincing argument! *

In the same article Engels expresses his profound esteem for Vaillant, and speaks of the "undeniable merit" of the latter (who, like Guesde, was one of the most prominent leaders of international Socialism up to August, 1914, before they both turned traitors to the cause of Socialism). But Engels does not allow an obvious mistake go by without a detailed analysis. Of course, to very young and inexperienced revolutionaries, as well as to petty-bourgeois revolutionaries, even though very experienced and of a very respectable age, it seems exceedingly "dangerous," incomprehensible and incorrect to "allow compromises." And many sophists (being super-, or excessively "experienced" politicians) reason precisely the same way as the British leaders of opportunism mentioned by Comrade Lansbury: "If it is permissible for the Bolsheviks to compromise, then why should we not be allowed to compromise?" But proletarians, schooled in numerous strikes (to take only this manifestation of the class struggle), usually understand the very profound (philosophical, historical, political and psychological) truth expounded very well by Engels. Every proletarian has gone through strikes and has experienced "compromises" with the hated oppressors and exploiters

* Friedrich Engels, "*Programm der blanquistischen Kommune-Flüchtlinge,*" *Volkstaat,* 1874, No. 73.

when the workers had to go back to work without having achieved anything, or after consenting to a partial satisfaction of their demands. Owing to the conditions of mass struggle and of the sharp intensification of class antagonism in which he lives, every proletarian observes the differences between a compromise extorted from him by objective conditions (such as lack of strike funds, no outside support, hunger and extreme exhaustion), a compromise which in no way lessens the revolutionary devotion and readiness for further struggle of the workers who agree to such a compromise, and a compromise by traitors, who ascribe to objective reasons their own selfishness (strikebreakers also effect a "compromise!"), their cowardice, their desire to fawn upon the capitalists and their readiness to yield to threats, sometimes to persuasion, sometimes to sops, and sometimes to flattery on the part of the capitalists. (Such cases of traitors' compromises by leaders of the British trade unions are particularly plentiful in the history of the British labour movement; but in one form or another nearly all workers in all countries have witnessed similar things.)

Of course, individual cases of exceptional difficulty and intricacy occur, when it is possible to determine correctly the real character of this or that "compromise" only with the greatest effort; just as cases of murder occur in which it is very difficult to decide whether the murder was fully justifiable and even necessary (as, for example, legitimate self-defence), or unpardonable negligence, or even a cunningly executed plan. Of course, in politics, in which sometimes extremely complicated—national and international—relationships between classes and parties have to be dealt with, very many cases will arise much more difficult than the question as to a legitimate compromise during a strike or a treasonable compromise of a strikebreaker or of a treacherous leader, etc. It would be absurd to concoct a recipe, or general rule ("No Compromise!"), that would serve in all cases. One must have the brains to analyse the situation in each separate case. Incidentally, the significance of a party organisation and of party leaders worthy of the name lies precisely in the fact that with the prolonged, stubborn, varied and all-sided efforts of all the thinking representatives of the given class,* the necessary

* In every class, even in the most enlightened countries, even in the case of the most advanced class, placed by the circumstances of the moment in a state of an exceptionally high upsurge of all spiritual forces, there always are —and, as long as classes exist, as long as a classless society has not fully en-

knowledge, the necessary experience and—apart from all knowledge and experience—the necessary political instinct for the quick and correct solution of intricate political problems may be acquired.

Naïve and utterly inexperienced people imagine that it is sufficient to admit the permissibility of compromises in *general* in order to obliterate the dividing line between opportunism, against which we wage and must wage an uncompromising struggle, and revolutionary Marxism or Communism. But if such people do not yet know that *all* dividing lines in nature and in society are mutable and, to a certain extent, conditional, they cannot be assisted in any way other than by a long process of training, education, enlightenment, political and every-day experience. In the practical questions of the politics of a given or specific historical moment it is important to single out those questions which manifest the principal type of impermissible, treacherous compromises which are the embodiment of opportunism fatal to the revolutionary class, and to exert all efforts to explain them and combat them. During the imperialist war of 1914-1918 between two groups of equally predatory and rapacious countries, such a principal fundamental type of opportunism was social-chauvinism, *i.e.*, the support of "defence of the fatherland," which, in *such* a war, was really equivalent to defence of the predatory interests of "one's own" bourgeoisie. After the war, the defence of the robber "League of Nations," the defence of direct or indirect alliances with the bourgeoisie of one's own country against the revolutionary proletariat and the "Soviet" movement, and the defence of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois parliamentarism against the "Soviet Power" became the principal manifestations of those inadmissible and treacherous compromises, the sum total of which represented opportunism fatal to the revolutionary proletariat and its cause.

" . . . To reject most decisively all compromise with other parties . . . all policy of manœuvring and compromise," write the German Lefts in the Frankfurt pamphlet.

A wonder that, holding such views, these Lefts do not decisively condemn Bolshevism! Surely, the German Lefts cannot but know that the whole history of Bolshevism, both before and after the

trenched and consolidated itself, has not developed itself on its own foundations, there inevitably *will be*—class representatives who do not think and are incapable of thinking. Were this not so, capitalism would not be the oppressor of the masses that it is.

October Revolution, is *full* of instances of manœuvring, temporising, and compromising with other parties, bourgeois parties included!

To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, which is a hundred times more difficult, prolonged, and complicated than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states; and to refuse beforehand to manœuvre, to utilise the conflict of interests (even though temporary) among one's enemies; to refuse to temporise and compromise with possible (even though transient, unstable, vacillating, and conditional) allies—is not this ridiculous in the extreme? Is it not as though, in the difficult ascent of an unexplored and heretofore inaccessible mountain, we were to renounce beforehand the idea that at times we might have to go in zig-zags, sometimes retracing our steps, sometimes giving up the course once selected and trying various others? And yet the Dutch Tribunists found it possible to support—it matters not whether directly or indirectly, openly or covertly, wholly or partially—people who are so ignorant and inexperienced (it is a good thing that their ignorance can be ascribed to their youth; god himself ordained that young persons should talk such nonsense for a certain period).

After the first Socialist revolution of the proletariat, after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie in one country, the proletariat of that country *for a long time* remains *weaker* than the bourgeoisie, simply because of the latter's extensive international connections and also because the small commodity producers in the land which has overthrown the bourgeoisie spontaneously and continuously restore and regenerate capitalism and the bourgeoisie. It is possible to conquer this most powerful enemy only by exerting our efforts to the utmost and by *necessarily*, thoroughly, carefully, attentively and skilfully taking advantage of every "fissure," however small, in the ranks of our enemies, of every antagonism of interests among the bourgeoisie of the various countries, among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie in the various countries; by taking advantage of every possibility, however small, of gaining an ally among the masses, even though this ally be temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional. Those who do not understand this do not understand even a grain of Marxism and of scientific modern socialism *in general*. Those whe have not proved *by deeds*, over a considerable period of time and in sufficiently varied political situations, their ability to apply this truth in practice have not yet learned to assist the revolutionary class in its struggle for the liberation of

the whole of toiling humanity from the exploiters. And this applies equally to the period before and after the conquest of political power by the proletariat.

Our theory is not a dogma but a *guide to action*, said Marx and Engels, and the greatest mistake, the greatest crime such "patented" Marxists as Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, etc., commit is that they have not understood this, that they were unable to apply it in the most important moments of the proletarian revolution. N. G. Chernyshevsky, the great Russian Socialist of the pre-Marxian period, used to say: "Political activity is not the pavement of the Nevsky Prospect" (the clean, broad, smooth pavement of the perfectly straight principal street of St. Petersburg). Since the time of Chernyshevsky the Russian revolutionaries have paid very dearly for ignoring or forgetting this truth. Every effort must be made to save the Left Communists and the west European and American revolutionaries, devoted to the working class, from paying as *dearly* for the assimilation of this truth as the backward Russians.

Before the downfall of tsarism, the Russian revolutionary Social-Democrats repeatedly utilised the services of the bourgeois liberals, *i.e.*, concluded numerous practical compromises with them. In 1901-1902, prior to the rise of Bolshevism, the old Editorial Board of *Iskra* (comprising Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Martov, Potresov, and myself) concluded—it is true, not for long—a formal political alliance with Struve, the political leader of bourgeois liberalism, while it was able at the same time to carry on an unceasing and merciless ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and against the slightest manifestation of its influence in the working class movement. The Bolsheviks always adhered to this policy. Since 1905 they systematically defended the alliance between the working class and the peasantry against the liberal bourgeoisie and tsarism, never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsarism (for instance, during the second stage of elections or second ballots), and never ceasing their irreconcilable ideological and political struggle against the bourgeois revolutionary peasant party, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, exposing them as petty-bourgeois democrats falsely masquerading as socialists. During the Duma elections in 1907, the Bolsheviks for a brief period entered into a formal political *bloc* with the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Between 1903 and 1912 there were periods of several years when we were formally united with the Mensheviks in a single

party, the Social-Democratic Party, but we *never* ceased our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and carriers of bourgeois influence among the proletariat. During the war we compromised to a certain extent with the Kautskyists, with the Left Mensheviks (Martov), and with a section of the Socialist-Revolutionaries (Chernov and Natanson); we had meetings with them at Zimmerwald and Kienthal and issued joint manifestoes; but we never ceased and never relaxed our ideological-political struggle against the Kautskyists, against Martov and Chernov. (Natanson died in 1919; he had become a "Revolutionary Communist" Narodnik *—very close to us, and almost in agreement with us.) At the very outbreak of the October Revolution we entered into an informal, but very important, and highly successful political *bloc* with the petty-bourgeois peasantry and adopted the *Socialist-Revolutionary* agrarian programme in its *entirety*, without a single alteration—that is, we entered into what was undoubtedly a compromise in order to prove to the peasants that we did not want to "steamroller" them but come to an agreement with them. At the same time, we proposed (and soon effected) a formal, political *bloc*, including participation in the government, to the "Left Socialist-Revolutionaries." The latter broke up this *bloc* after the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk Peace, and then in July 1918, rose in armed rebellion and later waged an armed struggle against us.

It can be understood, therefore, why the attacks of the German Lefts on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany for entertaining the idea of a *bloc* with the "Independents" (Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, the Kautskyists), seem to us to be frivolous, and to prove clearly that the "Lefts" are *wrong*. We in Russia also had Right Mensheviks (who participated in the Kerensky government) who corresponded to the German Scheidemanns, and Left Mensheviks (Martov), who were in opposition to the Right Mensheviks and who corresponded to the German Kautskyists. In 1917, the gradual passing of the masses of the workers from the Mensheviks to the Bolsheviks was clearly observed: at the first All-Russian Congress of Soviets, in June 1917, we had only 13 per cent of the votes; the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks had the majority. At the Second Congress of Soviets (November 7 [October 25], 1917) we had 51 per cent of the votes.

* Populist.—*Ed.*

Why did not an absolutely *identical* movement of the workers from Right to Left in Germany result in immediately strengthening the Communists, but first strengthened the intermediate "Independent" party, although this party never had independent political ideas, nor an independent policy, but only wavered between the Scheidemanns and the Communists?

Obviously, one of the reasons was the *mistaken* tactics of the German Communists, who must fearlessly and honestly admit this mistake and learn to rectify it. The mistake was that they repudiated the necessity of participating in reactionary bourgeois parliaments and in the reactionary trade unions; it consisted in the numerous manifestations of that "Left" infantile disorder which has now broken out on the surface; and the sooner the better—the more beneficial will the cure be.

The German Independent Social-Democratic Party is obviously not homogeneous. Alongside the old opportunist leaders (Kautsky, Hilferding, and, to a considerable extent, apparently, Crispien, Ledebour and others)—who have proven their inability to understand the significance of the Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, their inability to lead the latter in its revolutionary struggle—there has arisen in this party a Left proletarian wing which is growing with remarkable rapidity. Hundreds of thousands of proletarian members of this party (and it has, I think, about three-quarters of a million members) are leaving Scheidemann and are rapidly going over to communism. This proletarian wing has already proposed—at the Leipzig (1919) Congress of the Independents—immediate and unconditional affiliation with the Third International. To fear a "compromise" with this wing of the party is positively ridiculous. On the contrary, it is *the duty* of Communists to seek *and to find* an appropriate form of compromise with them, such a compromise as, on the one hand, would facilitate and accelerate the necessary complete fusion with this wing and, on the other, would not in any way hamper the Communists in their ideological-political struggle against the opportunist Right wing of the "Independents." Probably it will not be easy to devise the appropriate form of compromise, but only a charlatan could promise the German workers and German Communists an "easy" way to victory.

Capitalism would not be capitalism, if the "pure" proletariat were not surrounded by a large number of extremely varied transi-

tional types, from the proletarian to the semi-proletarian (who earns half his livelihood by the sale of his labour power), from the semi-proletarian to the small peasant (and petty craftsman, handicraft worker and small proprietor in general), from the small peasant to the middle peasant, and so on; and if, within the proletariat itself, there were no divisions into more or less developed strata, divisions according to territorial origin, according to trades, sometimes according to religion, and so on. And all this makes it necessary—absolutely necessary—for the vanguard of the proletariat, for its class-conscious section, the Communist Party, to resort to manœuvres and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small proprietors. The whole point lies in *knowing how* to apply these tactics in such a way as to *raise* and not lower the *general* level of proletarian class consciousness, revolutionary spirit and ability to fight and to conquer. Incidentally, it should be noted that the victory of the Bolsheviks over the Mensheviks demanded, not only before the October Revolution of 1917, *but also after it,* the application of tactics of manœuvring and compromise, of such a character, of course, as would facilitate, accelerate, consolidate and strengthen the Bolsheviks at the expense of the Mensheviks. The petty-bourgeois democrats (including the Mensheviks) invariably vacillate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between bourgeois democracy and the Soviet system, between reform and revolution, between love for the workers and fear of the proletarian dictatorship. The tactics the Communists must adopt are to *utilise* these vacillations and not to ignore them; and utilising them means making concessions to those elements which are turning towards the proletariat, when and to the extent that they turn towards the proletariat, while simultaneously fighting those who turn towards the bourgeoisie. As a result of the application of correct tactics, Menshevism in our country became and is becoming more and more disintegrated, the stubbornly opportunist leaders are becoming isolated, and the best workers, the best elements in the petty-bourgeois democracy, are being brought into our camp. This is a long process, and the hasty decision, "no compromises, no manœuvres," can only hinder the strengthening of the influence of the revolutionary proletariat and the growth of its forces.

Finally, one of the undoubted mistakes of the "Lefts" in Germany is their stubborn insistence on non-recognition of the Versailles

Peace. The more "solidly" and "importantly," the more "determinedly" and categorically this viewpoint is formulated (by K. Horner, for instance), the less sensible it appears. In the present conditions of the international proletarian revolution it is not enough to renounce the crying absurdities of "National Bolshevism" (Lauffenberg and others) which has gone to the length of advocating a *bloc* with the German bourgeoisie for war against the Entente. One must understand that the tactics which do not concede that it is essential for a Soviet Germany (if a German Soviet republic were established soon) to recognise the Versailles Peace for a time and to submit to it, are fundamentally wrong. From this it does not follow that the "Independents" were right in putting forward—at a time when the Scheidemanns were in the government, when the Soviet government of Hungary had not yet been overthrown, and when there was yet a possibility of a Soviet revolution in Vienna in support of Soviet Hungary—in putting forward *under these circumstances* the demand to sign the Versailles Treaty. At that time the "Independents" temporised and manœuvred very clumsily, for they more or less accepted responsibility for the Scheidemann traitors, they slipped, more or less from the viewpoint of the merciless (and most cold-blooded) class war against the Scheidemanns to the "classless" or "above-class" viewpoint.

At present, however, the position is obviously such that the German Communists should not tie their hands and promise positively and without fail to repudiate the Versailles Treaty in the event of the victory of communism. That would be foolish. They must say: the Scheidemanns and Kautskyists have perpetrated a series of treacheries; they obstructed (in part, directly ruining) an alliance with Soviet Russia and with Soviet Hungary. We Communists will do all we can to *facilitate* and *pave the way* for such an alliance; at the same time, we are by no means obliged to repudiate the Versailles Treaty immediately. The possibility of repudiating it successfully depends not only on the German but also on the international success of the Soviet movement. This movement has been hampered by the Scheidemanns and Kautskyists; we shall further it. Therein lies the crux of the matter; that is where the fundamental difference lies. And if our class enemies, the exploiters and their lackeys, the Scheidemanns and Kautskyists, missed a number of opportunities to strengthen both the German and the international Soviet movement, to strengthen the German and international Soviet

revolution, the blame falls upon them. The Soviet revolution in Germany will strengthen the international Soviet movement, which is the strongest bulwark—and the only reliable, invincible, omnipotent bulwark—against the Versailles Peace and against international imperialism in general. To put liberation from the Versailles Peace absolutely and unconditionally and immediately in the forefront, *before the question* of liberating other countries oppressed by imperialism from the yoke of imperialism, is petty-bourgeois nationalism (worthy of Kautsky, Hilferding, Otto Bauer and Co.) and is not revolutionary internationalism. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie in any of the large European countries, such as Germany, would be such a gain to the international revolution that for its sake one can, and must if necessary, tolerate a *more prolonged existence of the Versailles Peace.* If Russia by herself could endure the Brest-Litovsk Peace for several months to the advantage of the revolution, it is not impossible for Soviet Germany, in alliance with Soviet Russia, to endure an even longer existence of the Versailles Treaty to the advantage of the revolution.

The imperialists of France, England, etc., are trying to provoke the German Communists, they are laying a trap for them: "Say that you will not sign the Versailles Treaty!" And the Left Communists fall into the trap laid for them like children, instead of manœuvring skilfully against the crafty and, *at the present moment,* stronger enemy, instead of telling him: "To-day we shall sign the Versailles Treaty." To tie one's hands beforehand, openly to tell the enemy, who is now better armed than we are, whether and when we shall fight him is being stupid, not revolutionary. To accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy and not to us is a crime; and those politicians of the revolutionary class who are unable "to manœuvre, to compromise" in order to avoid an obviously disadvantageous battle are good for nothing.

IX

"Left-wing" Communism in England

In England there is not yet a Communist Party, but there is a fresh, broad, powerful and rapidly growing Communist movement among the workers which justifies the brightest hopes. There are several political parties and organisations (British Socialist Party,

the Socialist Labour Party, the South Wales Socialist Society, the Workers' Socialist Federation) which desire to form a Communist Party and are already carrying on negotiations towards this end. The *Workers' Dreadnought*, the weekly organ of the last-mentioned organisation, in its issue of February 21, 1920 (No. 48, Vol. VI), contains an article by the editor, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, entitled: "Towards a Communist Party." In this article she outlines the progress of the negotiations taking place between the four organisations mentioned for the formation of a united Communist Party on the basis of affiliation to the Third International, the recognition of the Soviet system instead of parliamentarism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It appears that one of the greatest obstacles to the immediate formation of a united Communist Party is the disagreement on the question of parliamentary action and the question of whether the new Communist Party should affiliate to the old, trade unionist, opportunist and social-chauvinist Labour Party. The Workers' Socialist Federation and the Socialist Labour Party * are opposed to taking part in parliamentary elections and in Parliament and are opposed to affiliation to the Labour Party, and in this disagree with all, or with the majority, of the members of the British Socialist Party, which they regard as the "Right wing of the Communist Parties" in England. (P. 5, Sylvia Pankhurst's article.)

Thus, the main division is the same as that in Germany, notwithstanding the enormous difference in the form in which the disagreement manifests itself (in Germany the form is more analogous to the Russian than to the English) and in a number of other things. Let us examine the arguments of the "Lefts."

On the question of parliamentary action, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst refers to an article in the same issue of her paper by Comrade W. Gallacher, who, in the name of the Scottish Workers' Council in Glasgow, writes:

> The above "Council" is definitely anti-parliamentarian, and has behind it the Left wing of the various political bodies.
>
> We represent the revolutionary movement in Scotland, striving continually to build up a revolutionary organisation within the industries, and a Communist Party, based on social committees, throughout the country. For a considerable time we have been sparring with the official parliamentarians. We have not considered it necessary to declare open warfare on them, *and they are afraid* to open attacks on us.

* I believe this party is opposed to affiliation to the Labour Party but is not altogether opposed to parliamentary action.

But this state of affairs cannot long continue. We are winning all along the line.

The rank and file of the I. L. P. in Scotland is becoming more and more disgusted with the thought of Parliament, and soviets or workers' councils are being supported by almost every branch.

This is very serious, of course, for the gentlemen who look to politics for a profession, and they are using any and every means to persuade their members to come back into the parliamentary fold.

Revolutionary comrades *must not* give any support to this gang. Our fight here is going to be a difficult one. One of the worst features of it will be the treachery of those whose personal ambition is a more impelling force than their regard for the revolution.

Any support given to parliamentarism is simply assisting to put power into the hands of our British Scheidemanns and Noskes. Henderson, Clynes and Co. are hopelessly reactionary. The official I. L. P. is more and more coming under the control of middle class Liberals, who, since the rout of the Liberal Party, have found their spiritual home in the camp of Messrs. MacDonald, Snowden and Co. The official I. L. P. is bitterly hostile to the Third International, the rank and file is for it. Any support to the parliamentary opportunists is simply playing into the hands of the former.

The B. S. P. doesn't count at all here. . . .

What is wanted here is a sound, revolutionary, industrial organisation and Communist Party working along clear, well-defined, scientific lines. If our comrades can assist us in building these, we will take their help gladly; if they cannot, for God's sake let them keep out altogether, lest they betray the revolution by lending their support to the reactionaries, who are so eagerly clamouring for parliamentary honours (?) [the query belongs to the author of the letter], and who are anxious to prove that they *can rule* as effectively as the boss class politicians themselves.

In my opinion this letter excellently expresses the temper and point of view of the young Communists, or rank and file workers, who are only just coming over to communism. This temper is very gratifying and valuable; we must learn to prize it and to support it, because without it, it is hopeless to expect the victory of the proletarian revolution in England or in any other country for that matter. People who can give expression to this temper of the masses, who can rouse such temper (very often dormant, not realised, not roused) among the masses, must be prized and every assistance must be given them. At the same time we must openly and frankly tell them that temper *alone* is not sufficient to lead the masses in the great revolutionary struggle, and that the mistakes that these very loyal adherents of the cause of the revolution are about to make, or are making, can damage the cause of the revolution. Comrade Gallacher's letter undoubtedly betrays the embryos of *all* the mistakes committed by the German "Left" Communists and which were committed by the "Left" Bolsheviks in 1908 and 1918.

The writer of the letter is imbued with noble, proletarian (intelligible and near, not only to the proletarians but also to all toilers, to all "small men," to use a German expression) hatred for the bourgeois "class politicians." The hatred felt by this representative of the oppressed and exploited masses is in truth the "beginning of all wisdom," the very basis of every socialist and communist movement, and of its success. But the author apparently fails to take into account the fact that politics is a science and an art that does not drop from the skies, is not acquired for nothing, and that if it wants to conquer the bourgeoisie, the proletariat must train *its own* proletarian "class politicians" who shall be as skilled as the bourgeois politicians.

The writer of the letter understands excellently that it is not parliament but workers' Soviets that alone can serve as instruments for achieving the aims of the proletariat, and, of course, those who have failed to understand this up to now are hopeless reactionaries, no matter whether they are the most highly educated people in the world, the most experienced politicians, the most sincere socialists, the most erudite Marxists, the most honest citizens and family men. But the writer of the letter does not raise the question, does not think of raising the question, as to whether it is possible to bring about the victory of the Soviets over parliament without getting our "Soviet" politicians *into* parliament, without disrupting parliamentarism from *within*, without preparing the ground within Parliament for the success of the Soviets' forthcoming task of dispersing parliament. And yet the writer of the letter expresses the correct idea that the Communist Party in England must operate on the basis of *scientific* principles. Science demands, first, the calculation of the experience of other countries, especially if these other countries, also capitalist countries, are undergoing, or have recently undergone, a very similar experience; second, science demands the calculation of *all* the forces, groups, parties, classes and masses operating in the given country, and does not demand that policy be determined by mere desires and views, degree of class consciousness and readiness for battle of only one group or party.

It is true that the Hendersons, the Clynes, the MacDonalds and the Snowdens are hopelessly reactionary. It is also true that they want to take power in their own hands (although they prefer a coalition with the bourgeoisie), that they want to govern according to the

old bourgeois rules, and that when they do get into power they will certainly act in the same way as the Scheidemanns and Noskes. All this is true. But the logical conclusion to be drawn from this is not that to support them is treachery to the revolution, but that in the interests of the revolution the revolutionaries in the working class should give these gentlemen a certain amount of parliamentary support. In order to explain this idea I will take two contemporary English political documents: (1) the speech delivered by the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, on March 18, 1920 (reported in the *Manchester Guardian* of March 19, 1920) and (2) the arguments of the "Left" Communist, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, in the article mentioned above.

Arguing against Asquith (who was especially invited to attend this meeting, but declined) and against those Liberals who do not want a coalition with the Conservatives but a *rapprochement* with the Labour Party (Comrade Gallacher in his letter also points to the fact that Liberals have joined the Independent Labour Party), Lloyd George said that a coalition, and a *close* coalition, with the Conservatives was essential because otherwise there would be a victory of the Labour Party, which Lloyd George "prefers to call" the Socialist Party and which is striving to "collectivise" the means of production.

In France this is called communism, the leader of the British bourgeoisie explained to his hearers (members of the Liberal Party who probably up to that time had been unaware of it). "In Germany it is called socialism, and in Russia it is called Bolshevism." This is opposed to Liberal principles, explained Lloyd George, because Liberalism stands for private property. "Civilisation is in danger," declared the orator, and, therefore, the Liberals and Conservatives must unite. . . .

. . . If you go to the agricultural areas—said Lloyd George—I agree that you have the old party divisions as strong as ever, they are far removed from the danger. It does not walk their lanes. But when they see it, they will be as strong as some of these industrial constituencies now are. Four-fifths of this country is industrial and commercial; hardly one-fifth is agricultural. It is one of the things I have constantly in mind when I think of the dangers of the future here. In France the population is agricultural, and you have a solid body of opinions which does not move very rapidly, and which is not very easily excited by revolutionary movements. That is not the case here. This country is more top-heavy than any country in the world, and if it begins to rock, the crash here, for that reason, will be greater than in any land.

From this the reader will see that Lloyd George is not only a clever man, but that he has also learned a great deal from the Marxists. It would not be a sin to learn from Lloyd George.

It is interesting to note the following episode that occurred in the course of the discussion which followed Lloyd George's speech:

Mr. Wallace, M.P.: I should like to ask what the Prime Minister considers the effect might be in the industrial constituencies upon the industrial workers, so many of whom are Liberals at the present time and from whom we get so much support. Would not a possible result be to cause an immediate overwhelming accession of strength to the Labour Party from men who are at present our cordial supporters?

The Prime Minister: I take a totally different view. The fact that Liberals are fighting among themselves undoubtedly drives a very considerable number of Liberals in despair to the Labour Party, where you get a considerable body of Liberals, very able men, whose business it is to discredit the Government. The result is undoubtedly to bring a good accession of public sentiment to the Labour Party. It does not go to the Liberals who are outside, it goes to the Labour Party, the by-elections show that.

Incidentally, I would like to say that this argument shows especially how even the cleverest people among the bourgeoisie have got themselves entangled and cannot avoid committing irreparable acts of stupidity. This will bring about their downfall. But our people may do stupid things (provided they are not very serious and are rectified in time) and yet, in the last resort, they will prove the victors.

The second political document is the following argument advanced by the "Left" Communist, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst:

. . . Comrade Inkpin (the General Secretary of the British Socialist Party) refers to the Labour Party as "the main body of the working class movement." Another comrade of the British Socialist Party, at the conference of the Third International just held, put the British Socialist Party view more strongly. He said: "We regard the Labour Party as the organised working class."

But we do not take this view of the Labour Party. The Labour Party is very large numerically, though its membership is to a great extent quiescent and apathetic, consisting of many workers who have joined the trade unions because their workmates are trade unionists, and to share the friendly benefits.

But we recognise that the great size of the Labour Party is also due to the fact that it is the creation of a school of thought beyond which the majority of the British working class has not yet emerged, though great changes are at work in the mind of the people which will presently alter this state of affairs. . . .

The British Labour Party, like the social-patriotic organisations of other countries, will, in the natural development of society, inevitably come into power. It is for the Communists to build up the forces which will overthrow

the social-patriots, and in this country we must not delay or falter in that work.

We must not dissipate our energy in adding to the strength of the Labour Party; its rise to power is inevitable. We must concentrate on making a Communist movement that will vanquish it.

The Labour Party will soon be forming a government; the revolutionary opposition must make ready to attack it.

Thus, the liberal bourgeoisie is abandoning the historical "two-party" (exploiters') system which has been sanctified by age-long experience and which has been extremely advantageous to the exploiters, and considers it necessary to unite their forces to fight the Labour Party. A section of the Liberals are deserting the Liberal Party, like rats leaving a sinking ship, and are joining the Labour Party. The Left Communists are of the opinion that the Labour Party's rise to power is inevitable and they admit that at present it has the support of the majority of the workers. From this they draw the strange conclusion which Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst formulates as follows:

The Communist Party must not enter into compromises. . . . The Communist Party must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence of reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way, without stopping or turning, by the direct road to the communist revolution.

On the contrary, from the fact that the majority of the workers in England still follow the lead of the English Kerenskys or Scheidemanns and that they have not yet had the experience of a government composed of these people, which experience was necessary in Russia and in Germany in order to secure the mass transition of workers to Communism, from this fact it undoubtedly follows that the British Communists *should* participate in parliament, should from *within* Parliament help the masses of the workers see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government, should help the Hendersons and Snowdens to defeat the combined Lloyd Georges and Churchills. To act in a different way would mean to place difficulties in the way of the cause of the revolution, because, revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class and this change is brought about by the political experience of the masses, never by propaganda alone. "To march forward without compromise, without turning from the path"—if this is said by an obviously impotent minority of the workers who know (or at all events should know) that very soon, when the Hen-

dersons and Snowdens will have gained the victory over the Lloyd Georges and Churchills, the majority will be disappointed in their leaders and will begin to support Communism (or at all events will adopt an attitude of neutrality, and largely an attitude of friendly neutrality towards the Communists), then this slogan is obviously mistaken. It is like 10,000 soldiers going into battle against 50,000 enemy soldiers, when it would be wise to "halt," to "turn from the path" and even enter into a "compromise" in order to gain time until the arrival of the reinforcements of 100,000 which are bound to come, but which cannot go into action immediately. This is intellectual childishness and not the serious tactics of a revolutionary class.

The fundamental law of revolution, confirmed by all revolutions and particularly by all three Russian revolutions in the twentieth century, is as follows: it is not sufficient for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses understand the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes; for revolution it is necessary that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. Only when the "lower classes" *do not want* the old and when the "upper classes" cannot *continue in the old way* then only can the revolution be victorious. This truth may be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a national crisis affecting both the exploited and the exploiters. It follows that for revolution it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, politically active workers) should fully understand the necessity for revolution and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes be in a state of governmental crisis which draws even the most backward masses into politics (a symptom of every real revolution is: the rapid tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the number of hitherto apathetic representatives of the toiling and oppressed masses capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government and makes it possible for the revolutionaries to overthrow it rapidly.

In England, as can be seen incidentally from Lloyd George's speech, both conditions for the successful proletarian revolution are obviously maturing. And the mistakes the Left Communists are making are particularly dangerous at the present time precisely because certain revolutionaries are not displaying a sufficiently thoughtful, attentive, intelligent and calculating attitude towards either of these conditions. If we—not a revolutionary group, but

the Party of the revolutionary *class*—if we want the *masses* to follow us (and unless they do, we stand the risk of remaining mere talkers) we must, first, help Henderson or Snowden beat Lloyd George and Churchill (or to be more correct: compel the former to beat the latter, because the former are *afraid to win*); secondly, help the majority of the working class to become convinced by their own experience that we are right, *i.e.*, that the Hendersons and Snowdens are utterly worthless, that they are petty-bourgeois and treacherous and that their bankruptcy is inevitable; thirdly, bring nearer the moment when, on the basis of the disappointment of the majority of the workers in the Hendersons, it will be possible with good chances of success to overthrow the government of the Hendersons at once, because if the very clever and solid, not petty bourgeois but big bourgeois, Lloyd George, betrays utter consternation and weakens himself (and the whole of the bourgeoisie) more and more by his "friction" with Churchill one day and his "friction" with Asquith the next day, how much more so will this be the case with the Henderson government!

I will speak more concretely. In my opinion, the British Communists should unite their four (all very weak and some of them very, very weak) parties and groups into a single Communist Party on the basis of the principles of the Third International and of *obligatory* participation in Parliament. The Communist Party should propose to the Hendersons and Snowdens that they enter into a "compromise" election agreement, *viz.*, march together against the alliance of Lloyd George and the Conservatives, divide the seats in Parliament in proportion to the number of votes cast for the Labour Party and Communist Party respectively (not at parliamentary elections, but in a special ballot), while the Communist Party retains *complete liberty* to carry on agitation, propaganda and political activity. Without the latter condition, of course, no such *bloc* could be concluded, for that would be an act of betrayal: the British Communists must insist on and secure complete liberty to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (*for fifteen years*—1903-17) the Russian Bolsheviks insisted on and secured it in relation to the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, *i.e.*, the Mensheviks.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens accept the *bloc* on these terms, then we gain because the number of seats in Parliament is not a matter of importance to us; we are not chasing after seats,

therefore we can yield on this point (the Hendersons and particularly their new friends—or is it their new masters?—the Liberals, who have joined the Independent Labour Party, are particularly eager to get seats). We will gain, because we will carry *our* agitation among the *masses* at a moment when Lloyd George *himself* has "incensed" them, and we will not only help the Labour Party establish its government more quickly, but also help the masses understand more quickly the Communist propaganda that we will carry on against the Hendersons without curtailment and without evasions.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject the *bloc* with us on these terms we will gain still more, because we will have at once shown the *masses* (note that even in the purely Menshevik and utterly opportunist Independent Labour Party the *rank and file* is in favour of Soviets) that the Hendersons prefer *their* closeness with the capitalists to the unity of all the workers. We will immediately gain in the eyes of the *masses* who, particularly after the brilliant, very correct and very useful (for communism) explanations given by Lloyd George, will sympathise with the idea of uniting all the workers against the Lloyd George-Conservative alliance. We will gain immediately because we will demonstrate to the masses that the Hendersons and the Snowdens are afraid to beat Lloyd George, afraid to take power themselves and are *secretly* striving to get the support of Lloyd George, who is *openly* stretching out his hand to the Conservatives against the Labour Party. It should be noted that in Russia, after the Revolution of March 12 [February 27], 1917, the propaganda of the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries (*i.e.*, the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens) gained a great deal precisely because of a circumstance like this. We said to the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries: take complete power without the bourgeoisie, because you have the majority in the Soviets (at the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets in June 1917, the Bolsheviks had only 13 per cent of the votes). But the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens feared to take power without the bourgeoisie, and when the bourgeoisie delayed the convocation of the Constituent Assembly because they knew perfectly well that the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries would have the majority in it * (the latter had entered into a close political

* The elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917 resulted in the following (based on returns covering over 36,000,000 votes): the Bolsheviks obtained 25 per cent of the votes cast; the various parties of the land-

bloc and both really represented *nothing but* petty-bourgeois democracy), the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries were not able to put up a consistent and strenuous struggle against these delays.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject the *bloc* with the Communists, the Communists will gain immediately in regard to winning the sympathy of the masses and in discrediting the Hendersons and Snowdens, and if, as a result, we do lose a few parliamentary seats it is not a matter of importance. We would put up candidates in a very few, but absolutely safe constituencies, *i.e.*, where our candidate would not let the Liberal in, in opposition to the Labour candidate. We would take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets advocating communism, and in *all* constituencies where we have no candidates urge the electors *to vote for the Labour candidate against the bourgeois candidate.* Comrades Sylvia Pankhurst and Gallacher are mistaken in thinking that this is the betrayal of communism, the abandonment of the struggle against the social-traitors. On the contrary, the communist revolution undoubtedly stands to gain by it.

At the present time the British Communists very often find it hard to approach the masses and even to get them to listen to them. If I as a Communist come out and call upon the workers to vote for the Hendersons against Lloyd George, they will certainly listen to me. And I will be able to explain in a popular manner not only why Soviets are better than Parliament and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (which is concealed behind the signboard of bourgeois "democracy"), but I will also be able to explain that I want to support Henderson with my vote in the same way as a rope supports one who is hanged—that the establishment of a Henderson government will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will accelerate the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens as was the case with their friends in Russia and Germany.

And if the objection is raised: these tactics are too "subtle" or too complicated, the masses will not understand them, they will split up and scatter our forces, will prevent us from concentrating our forces on the Soviet revolution, etc.—I will reply to the "Lefts"

lords and capitalists obtained 13 per cent and the petty-bourgeois democratic parties, *i.e.*, the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and a number of kindred groups, obtained 62 per cent.

who raise this objection: don't put the blame for your dogmatism upon the masses! In all probability the masses in Russia are not more educated than the masses in England; if anything they are less so. And yet the masses understood the Bolsheviks; and the fact that on the *eve* of the Soviet revolution, in September 1917, the Bolsheviks put up their candidates for a bourgeois parliament (the Constituent Assembly) and on the *morrow* of the Soviet revolution, in November 1917, took part in the election of this Constituent-Assembly which they dispersed on January 18 [5], 1918—this fact did not hamper the Bolsheviks, but on the contrary, it helped them.

I cannot deal here with the second point of disagreement among the British Communists, *viz.*, the question of affiliation to the Labour Party. I have too little material at my disposal on this question, which is a particularly complicated one in view of the peculiar character of the Labour Party, the very structure of which is so unlike the ordinary political party on the Continent. It is beyond doubt, however, first, that on this question also, those who think that they will be able to deduce the tactics of the revolutionary proletariat from principles like: "A Communist Party must keep its doctrine pure and its independence of reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way, without stopping or turning, by the direct road to the communist revolution"—will fall into error. For such principles are merely a repetition of the mistakes committed by the French Communard-Blanquists, who, in 1874, "repudiated" all compromises and all the intermediary stations. Secondly, it is beyond doubt that in this question, too, the task is to apply the general and main principles of communism to the *peculiar* relations between classes and parties, to the *peculiar features* in the objective development towards communism which are observed in every country and which one must know, study, seek, divine.

But this must be discussed not only in connection with British communism alone but in connection with the general conclusions concerning the development of communism in all capitalist countries. We shall now proceed to deal with this theme.

X

Some Conclusions

The Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905 marked a very peculiar turn in world history: in one of the most backward capitalist countries the strike movement attained a breadth and power unprecedented in the world. In the *first month of 1905 alone* the number of strikers was ten times the average yearly number for the previous ten years (1895-1904); and from January to October, 1905, strikes grew continuously and on an enormous scale. Under the influence of a number of entirely unique historical conditions, backward Russia was the first to show to the world not only a spasmodic growth of independent activity on the part of the oppressed masses during revolution (this happened in all great revolutions), but also a proletariat whose significance was infinitely greater than its numerical proportion to the total population, the combination of the economic and political strike, the transformation of the latter into an armed uprising, and the birth of a new form of mass struggle and mass organisation of the classes oppressed by capitalism, *viz.*, the Soviets. The February and October Revolutions of 1917 resulted in the all-round development of the Soviets on a national scale, and in their victory in the proletarian, socialist revolution. And in less than two years, the international character of the Soviets, the spread of this method of struggle and form of organisation to the working class movement of the whole world, and the historical mission of the Soviets to be the grave-digger, the heir, and the successor of bourgeois parliamentarism, of bourgeois democracy in general, became revealed.

More than that, the history of the working class movement now shows that in all countries it is about to experience (and it has already begun to experience) the struggle of nascent communism—which is becoming strong and is marching towards victory—with, first and foremost, *its own* (of each particular country) "Menshevism," *i.e.*, opportunism and social-chauvinism, and, second, as a sort of supplement, with "Left-wing" Communism. The first struggle has developed in all countries, apparently without a single exception, as a struggle between the Second International already virtually dead and the Third International. The second struggle can be observed in Germany, in England, in Italy, in America (at least

a certain *section* of the Industrial Workers of the World and the anarcho-syndicalist elements in America defend the errors of "Left" Communism while simultaneously there is an almost universal, almost unanimous acceptance of the Soviet system), and in France (the attitude of a section of the former syndicalists towards the political party and parliamentarism, and here too, while at the same time accepting the Soviet system), *i.e.*, the struggle, undoubtedly, is being waged not only on a national but also on an international scale.

But, while the working class movement is everywhere passing through what is practically a similar preparatory school for victory over the bourgeoisie, it is in each country achieving this development in *its own way*. The big, advanced capitalist countries are marching along this road *much more rapidly* than did Bolshevism which history granted a period of fifteen years to prepare itself for victory as an organised political trend. The Third International has already scored a decisive victory in the short space of one year; it has defeated the yellow, social-chauvinist Second International, which only a few months ago was incomparably stronger than the Third International, and which seemed to be firm and strong, enjoying the all-round support—direct and indirect, material (ministerial posts, passports, the press) and ideological—of the world bourgeoisie.

The main thing now is that the Communists of every country should quite consciously take into account the fundamental tasks of the struggle against opportunism and "Left" doctrinairism as well as the concrete *peculiar features* which this struggle assumes and inevitably must assume in each separate country in accordance with the peculiar features of its economics, politics, culture, national composition (Ireland, etc.), its colonies, religious divisions, etc. Everywhere we observe widening and growing dissatisfaction with the Second International because of its opportunism, its inability or incapability, to create a really centralised, really leading centre which would be capable of guiding the international tactics of the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle for the world Soviet republic. We must clearly realise that such a leading center cannot under any circumstances be built up on stereotyped, mechanically equalised, identical tactical rules of the struggle. As long as national and state differences exist among peoples and countries—and these differences will continue to exist for a very long time, even after

the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale—the unity of international tactics of the communist working class movement of all countries demands not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences (this is a foolish dream at the present moment), but such an application of the *fundamental* principles of communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) as will *correctly modify* these principles in *certain particulars*, will properly adapt, apply them to the national and national-state differences. To investigate, study, seek out, divine, grasp that which is specifically national in the *concrete manner* in which each country *approaches* the fulfilment of the *single* international task, the victory over opportunism and "Left" doctrinairism in the working class movement, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the establishment of a Soviet republic and a proletarian dictatorship—this is the main task of the historical period through which all the advanced (and not only the advanced) countries are now passing. The main thing—not everything, by a very long way—but the main thing has already been achieved in that the vanguard of the working class has been won over, in that it has gone over to the side of the Soviet power against parliamentarism, to the side of the dictatorship of the proletariat against bourgeois democracy. Now all efforts, all attention must be concentrated on the *next* step—which seems, and from a certain standpoint really is, less fundamental, but which in fact is much closer to the practical carrying out of the task—namely, on seeking out the forms of *transition or approach* to the proletarian revolution.

The proletarian vanguard has been ideologically won over. This is the most important thing. Without this, we cannot take even the first step towards victory. But from this first step it is still a long way to victory. With the vanguard alone victory is impossible. To throw the vanguard alone into the decisive battle when the whole class, when the broad masses have not yet taken up a position either of direct support of the vanguard, or at least of benevolent neutrality towards it and one in which they cannot possibly support the enemy, would not merely be folly, but a crime. And in order that actually the whole class, that actually the broad masses of toilers and those oppressed by capital may take up such a position, propaganda and agitation alone are not sufficient. For this the masses must have their own political experience. Such is the fundamental law of all great revolutions, confirmed now with astonishing

force and vividness not only in Russia but also in Germany. It has been necessary—not only for the uncultured, often illiterate, masses of Russia, but for the highly cultured, entirely literate masses of Germany—to realise through their own painful experience the absolute impotence and characterlessness, the absolute helplessness and servility before the bourgeoisie, the absolute baseness of the government of the knights of the Second International, the absolute inevitability of a dictatorship of the extreme reactionaries (Kornilov in Russia, Kapp and Co. in Germany) as the only alternative to a dictatorship of the proletariat, in order to turn them resolutely toward communism.

The immediate task that confronts the class conscious vanguard of the international labour movement, *i.e.*, the Communist Parties, groups and trends, is to be able to *lead* the broad masses (now, for the most part, slumbering, apathetic, hidebound, inert, and dormant) to their new position, or, rather, to be able to lead *not only* their own Party but also the masses during the course of their approach, their transition to the new position. While the first historical task (*viz.*, that of winning over the class conscious vanguard of the proletariat to the side of the Soviet power and the dictatorship of the working class) could not be accomplished without a complete ideological and political victory over opportunism and social-chauvinism, the second task, which now becomes the immediate task, and which is to lead *the masses* to the new position that will assure the victory of the vanguard in the revolution, this immediate task cannot be accomplished without the liquidation of Left doctrinairism, without completely overcoming and getting rid of its mistakes.

As long as the question was (and in so far as it still is) one of winning over the vanguard of the proletariat to the side of communism, so long and to that extent propaganda took first place; even propaganda circles, with all the imperfections that circles suffer from, are useful under these conditions and produce fruitful results. But if it is a question of the practical activities of the masses, a question of the disposition, if one may so express it, of vast armies, of the alignment of all the class forces of the given society *for the final and decisive battle*, then propaganda alone, the mere repetition of the truths of "pure" communism are of no avail. In these circumstances one must count, not up to a thousand—as is really done by the propagandist who belongs to a small group which does not yet lead the masses; but one must count in millions and tens of millions.

In these circumstances one must not only ask oneself whether the vanguard of the revolutionary class has been convinced but also whether the historically effective forces of *all* classes—positively of all the classes in the given society without exception—are aligned in such a way that the decisive battle is fully matured, in such a way that (1) all the class forces hostile to us have become sufficiently confused, are sufficiently at loggerheads with each other, have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle beyond their capacities; that (2) all the vacillating, wavering, unstable, intermediate elements—the petty bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois democracy as distinct from the bourgeoisie—have sufficiently exposed themselves before the people and have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy; and that (3) among the proletariat a mass mood in favour of supporting the most determined, unreservedly bold, revolutionary action against the bourgeoisie has arisen and begins to grow powerfully. Then, indeed, revolution is ripe; then, indeed, if we have correctly gauged all the conditions outlined above and if we have chosen the moment rightly, our victory is assured.

The disagreements between the Churchills and the Lloyd Georges —with insignificant national differences, these types exist in *all* countries—on the one hand, and between the Hendersons and the Lloyd Georges on the other, are quite unimportant and petty from the point of view of pure, *i.e.*, abstract communism, *i.e.*, communism that has not yet matured to the stage of practical, mass, political action. But from the point of view of this practical mass action, these differences are very, very important. It is the very important business and task of the Communist who wants to be not merely a class conscious, convinced and ideological propagandist, but a practical leader of the *masses* in the revolution to take them into account, to determine the moment when the inevitable conflicts between these "friends," which will weaken *all the "friends" taken together* and render them impotent, will have completely matured. It is necessary to combine the strictest loyalty to the ideas of communism with the ability to make all necessary practical compromises, to "tack," to make agreements, zig-zags, retreats and so on, in order to accelerate the coming into political power of the Hendersons (the heroes of the Second International, if we are not to speak of individuals who represent petty-bourgeois democracy but who call themselves socialists) and then their loss of power;

to accelerate their inevitable practical bankruptcy which will enlighten the masses in the spirit of our ideas, in the direction of communism; to accelerate the inevitable friction, quarrels, conflicts and complete disunity between the Hendersons, the Lloyd Georges and Churchills (Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Constitutional Democrats, Monarchists, Scheidemanns, the bourgeoisie, the Kappists, etc.) and to select the moment when the disunity among these "pillars of the sacred right of property" is at its highest, in order to defeat them all by a determined attack of the proletariat and capture political power.

History generally, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more many-sided, more lively and "subtle" than the best parties and the most class conscious vanguards of the most advanced class imagine. This is understandable because the best vanguards express the class consciousness, the will, the passion, the fantasy of tens of thousands, while the revolution is made, at the moment of its climax and the exertion of all human capabilities, by the class consciousness, the will, the passion and the fantasy of tens of millions who are urged on by the very acutest class struggle. From this follow two very important practical conclusions: first, that the revolutionary class, in order to fulfil its task, must be able to master *all* forms or sides of social activity without exception (and complete after the capture of political power, sometimes at great risk and amidst very great dangers, what it did not complete before the capture of power); second, that the revolutionary class must be ready to pass from one form to another in the quickest and most unexpected manner.

Every one will agree that an army which does not train itself to wield all arms, all means and methods of warfare that the enemy possesses or may possess is behaving in an unwise or even in a criminal manner. This applies to politics to a greater degree than it does to war. In politics it is harder to forecast what methods of warfare will be applied and be considered useful for us under certain future conditions. Unless we are able to master all methods of warfare we stand the risk of suffering great and sometimes decisive defeat if the changes in the position of the other classes, which we cannot determine, will bring to the front forms of activity in which we are particularly weak. If, however, we are able to master all methods of warfare, we shall certainly be victorious, because we represent the interests of the really advanced, of the really revolu-

tionary class, even if circumstances do not permit us to use weapons that are most dangerous for the enemy, weapons that are most quickly death-dealing. Inexperienced revolutionaries often think that legal methods of struggle are opportunist because in this field the bourgeoisie very frequently (especially in "peaceful," non-revolutionary times) deceived and fooled the workers, and they think that illegal methods of struggle are revolutionary. But this is not true. What is true is that the opportunists and the traitors to the working class are those parties and leaders who are not able or who do not want (don't say: you cannot; say: you won't; *wer will, kann* *) to apply illegal methods of struggle in conditions such as, for example, prevailed during the imperialist war of 1914-1918, when the bourgeoisie of the freest democratic countries deceived the workers in the most impudent and brutal manner and prohibited every one from speaking the truth about the predatory character of the war. But revolutionaries who are unable to combine illegal forms of struggle with every form of legal struggle are very bad revolutionaries. It is not difficult to be a revolutionary when the revolution has already flared up, when everybody joins the revolution simply because they are carried away by it, because it is the fashion and sometimes even because it might open a career. After the victory the proletariat has to exert extreme effort, to suffer pains and one might say martyrdom to "liberate" itself from such alleged revolutionaries. It is much more difficult—and much more useful—to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct, open, really mass and really revolutionary struggle have *not yet* matured, to be able to defend the interests of the revolution (by propaganda, agitation and organisation) in non-revolutionary bodies and even in reactionary bodies, in non-revolutionary circumstances, among the masses who are incapable of immediately appreciating the necessity for revolutionary methods of action. The main task of contemporary Communism in western Europe and America is to acquire the ability to seek, to find, to determine correctly the concrete path, or the particular turn of events that will *bring* the masses *right up* to the real, decisive, last and great revolutionary struggle.

Take England, for example: We cannot say, and no one is in a position to say beforehand, how soon the real proletarian revolution will flare up there and *what* will serve as the *cause* to rouse it, to

* An equivalent expression in English: "Where there's a will, there's a way."—*Ed.*

kindle it and move into the struggle very wide masses who are at present dormant. Hence, it is our duty to carry on our preparatory work in such a manner as to be "well shod on all four legs," as the late Plekhanov was fond of saying when he was a Marxist and revolutionary. It is possible that a parliamentary crisis will cause the "breach," will "break the ice"; perhaps it will be a crisis caused by the hopelessly entangled and increasingly painful and acute colonial and imperialist contradictions, perhaps some third cause, etc. We are not discussing the kind of struggle that will *determine* the fate of the proletarian revolution in England (not a single Communist has any doubts on that score; as far as we are concerned, this question is settled and definitely settled). What we are discussing is the *immediate cause* that will rouse the proletarian masses, at present dormant, and bring them right up to the revolution.

Let us not forget that in the bourgeois French Republic for example, in a situation which from both the international and national aspect was a hundred times less revolutionary than the present one, one out of the thousands and thousands of dishonest tricks the reactionary military caste play (the Dreyfuss case) * was enough to serve as the "unexpected" and "petty" cause which brought the people to the verge of civil war!

In England the Communists should uninterruptedly, unfalteringly and undeviatingly utilise the parliamentary struggle and all the perturbations of the Irish, colonial and world imperialist policy of the British government and all other spheres and sides of social life and work in all of them in a new way, in a communist way, in the spirit not of the Second but of the Third International. I have neither the time nor the space here to describe the methods of "Russian," "Bolshevik" participation in parliamentary elections and in the parliamentary struggle, but I can assure the foreign Communists that this was not anything like the usual West-European parliamentary campaign. From this the conclusion is usually drawn: "Well, that was in Russia, but in our country parliamentarism is something different." This conclusion is wrong. The very purpose of the existence of Communists in the world, adherents of the Third International in all countries, is to *change* all along the line, in all spheres of life, the old socialist, trade unionist, syndicalist parlia-

* The arrest and imprisonment of Captain Dreyfuss in 1894, a French officer of Jewish origin, on charges trumped-up by a reactionary and anti-Semitic military clique.—*Ed.*

mentary work into *new* communist work. In Russia, too, we had a great deal of opportunist and purely bourgeois, money-making and capitalist swindling during elections. The Communists in western Europe and America must learn to create a new, unusual, non-opportunist, non-careerist parliamentarism; the Communist Parties must issue their slogans, real proletarians with the help of the unorganised and very poorest people should scatter and distribute leaflets, canvass the workers' houses and the cottages of the rural proletarians and peasants in the remote villages (fortunately there are not nearly so many remote villages in Europe as there are in Russia, and in England there are very few), they should go into the most common inns, penetrate into the unions, societies and casual meetings where the common people gather and talk to the people, not in scientific (and not very parliamentary) language, not in the least to strive to "get seats" in parliament, but everywhere to rouse the thoughts of the masses and draw them into the struggle, to take the bourgeoisie at their word, to utilise the apparatus they have set up, the elections they have called for, the appeal to the country that they have made and to tell the people what Bolshevism is in a way that has not been possible (under bourgeois rule) outside of election times (not counting, of course, times of big strikes, when in Russia a *similar* apparatus for widespread popular agitation worked even more intensively). It is very difficult to do this in western Europe and America—very, very difficult—but it can and must be done, because generally speaking the tasks of communism cannot be fulfilled without effort, and every effort must be made to fulfil the *practical* tasks, ever more varied, ever more connected with all branches of social life, *winning* branch after branch from the *bourgeoisie*.

In England, also, it is necessary to organise in a new way (not in a socialist manner but in a communist manner, not in a reformist manner but in a revolutionary manner) the work of propaganda, agitation and organisation among the armed forces and among the oppressed and disfranchised nationalities in "one's own" state (Ireland, the colonies). Because in all these spheres of social life, in the epoch of imperialism generally, and particularly now, after the war which tortured nationalities and quickly opened their eyes to the truth (*viz.*, tens of millions killed and maimed only for the purpose of deciding whether the British or German pirates shall plunder the largest number of countries)—all these spheres of social

life are becoming particularly filled with inflammable material and create numerous causes of conflict, crises and the intensification of the class struggle. We do not know and we cannot know which spark—out of the innumerable sparks that are flying around in all countries as a result of the political and economic world crises—will kindle the conflagration, in the sense of specially rousing the masses, and we must, therefore, with the aid of our new, communist principles, set to work to "stir up" all, even the oldest, mustiest and seemingly hopeless spheres, for otherwise we shall not be able to cope with our tasks, we will not be all-sided, we will not be able to master all weapons and we will not be prepared either for victory over the bourgeoisie (which arranged all sides of social life, and has now disarranged all sides of social life in a bourgeois way) nor for the forthcoming communist reorganisation of the whole of social life after the victory.

After the proletarian revolution in Russia and the international victories of this revolution, which the bourgeoisie and the philistines did not expect, the whole world has become different and everywhere the bourgeoisie has also become different. It is terrified by "Bolshevism," it is enraged against it almost to madness, and precisely for that reason it is, on the one hand, accelerating the progress of events, and on the other, it is concentrating attention on the suppression of Bolshevism by force and is in that way weakening its position in a number of other fields. The Communists in all advanced countries should take both these circumstances into consideration in their tactics.

When the Russian Cadets and Kerensky raised a mad hue-and-cry against the Bolsheviks—especially after April 1917, and more particularly in June and July 1917—they "overdid" it. Millions of copies of bourgeois papers, shouting in all keys against the Bolsheviks, helped to induce the masses to appraise Bolshevism; and, apart from the newspapers, the whole of public life was permeated with discussions about Bolshevism, precisely because of the zeal of the bourgeoisie. At present, the millionaires of all countries are behaving on an international scale in such a manner as to deserve our heartiest thanks. They are hunting down Bolshevism with the same zeal as did Kerensky and Co.; they are "overdoing" it and *helping* us quite as much as did Kerensky. When the French bourgeoisie makes Bolshevism the central point of the election campaign, accusing the comparatively moderate or vacillating Socialists of

Bolshevism; wher. the American bourgeoisie, having completely lost its head, seizes thousands and thousands of people upon suspicion of Bolshevism and creates an atmosphere of panic, spreading broadcast alarm of Bolshevik plots; when the British bourgeoisie—the most "solid" in the world—in spite of all its wisdom and experience, commits acts of incredible stupidity, founds the most richly endowed "societies for struggle against Bolshevism," creates a special literature on Bolshevism, and engages for the struggle against it an extra number of scientists, priests, and agitators—we must bow and thank these worthy capitalists. They are working for us. They are helping us get the masses interested in the question of the nature and significance of Bolshevism. And they cannot act otherwise; for to "kill by silence," to stifle Bolshevism—in this they have *already* failed.

But at the same time the bourgeoisie sees in Bolshevism almost only one side—insurrection, violence, terror; it therefore strives to prepare itself especially for resistance and opposition on *this* field. It is possible that in single cases, in individual countries, and for more or less brief periods, it will succeed in this. We must reckon with such a possibility, and there will be absolutely nothing terrible for us if it does succeed. Communism "springs up" from positively all sides of social life. Its shoots are to be seen literally everywhere; the "contagion" (to use the favourite metaphor of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois police, the one that "pleases" them most) has very thoroughly permeated its organism and completely impregnated it. If one of the outlets is "stopped up" with special care, the "contagion" will find another, sometimes a very unexpected, outlet. Life will assert itself. Let the bourgeoisie rave, work itself into a frenzy, overdo things, commit stupidities, take vengeance on the Bolsheviks in advance and endeavour to kill off (in India, Hungary, Germany, etc.) hundreds, thousands, and hundreds of thousands more of yesterday's and tomorrow's Bolsheviks. Acting thus, the bourgeoisie acts as all classes doomed by history have acted. Communists should know that the future, at any rate, belongs to them; therefore, we can, and must, combine the most intense passion in the great revolutionary struggle with the coolest and most sober evaluation of the mad ravings of the bourgeoisie. The Russian Revolution was cruelly defeated in 1905; the Russian Bolsheviks were defeated in July 1917; by means of the artful provocations and cunning manœuvres of Scheidemann and Noske,

in conjunction with the bourgeoisie and monarchist generals, over 15,000 German Communists were slaughtered.* White Terror is raging in Finland and Hungary. But in all cases and in all countries communism is becoming steeled and is growing, its roots are so deep that persecution neither weakens nor debilitates it; rather does it strengthen it. Only one thing is lacking to enable us to march forward more surely and more firmly towards victory, namely, the full and completely thought out conviction on the part of all Communists in all countries of the necessity of displaying maximum *flexibility* in their tactics. Magnificently developing communism, particularly in the advanced countries, now lacks in this conviction and the ability to apply it in practice.

The experience of highly erudite Marxists and leaders of the Second International who were devoted to socialism, such as Kautsky, Otto Bauer, and others could, and should, serve as a useful lesson. They fully appreciated the necessity of flexible tactics; they learned and taught others Marxist dialectics (and much of what they have done in this respect will remain forever a valuable contribution to socialist literature); but *in the application* of these dialectics they made such a mistake or, rather, proved in practice to be so undialectic, so incapable of taking into account the rapid changes of forms and the rapid filling of old forms with new content that their fate is not much more enviable than that of Hyndam, Guesde, and Plekhanov. The main reason for their bankruptcy was that they "concentrated their gaze" on one definite form of growth of the working class movement and of socialism, forgot all about the one-sidedness of this form, were afraid of seeing the sharp break which, by virtue of objective conditions, became inevitable, and continued to repeat the simple, routine, and at first glance incontestable truths, such as: "three is more than two." But politics is more like algebra than arithmetic; it is more like higher than lower mathematics. In reality, all the old forms of the socialist movement have been filled with a new content and, consequently, a new sign, the "minus" sign appeared in front of all figures; but our wiseacres stubbornly continued (and continue) to persuade themselves and others that "minus three" is more than "minus two!"

We must see to it that the Communists do not repeat the same mistake, only the other way round; or rather, we must see to it

* The counter-revolutionary attack organised by the Socialist government in 1919.—*Ed.*

that the *same mistake*, only the other way round, committed by the "Left" Communists should be corrected as soon as possible and be overcome as quickly and as painlessly for the organism as possible. Not only is Right doctrinairism a mistake; so also is Left doctrinairism. Of course, the mistake of Left doctrinairism in communism is at the present moment a thousand times less dangerous and less significant than the mistake of Right doctrinairism (*i.e.*, social-chauvinism and Kautskyism); but after all, this is only due to the fact that Left Communism is a very young trend, which is only just coming into being. It is only for this reason that, given certain conditions, the disease can be easily cured; and it is necessary to set to work curing it with the utmost energy.

The old forms have burst, for it turned out that their new content—anti-proletarian and reactionary—had obtained inordinate development. We now have from the standpoint of the development of international communism such a lasting, strong and powerful content of work (for the Soviet power, for the dictatorship of the proletariat) that it can *and must* manifest itself in any form, both new and old; that it can and must regenerate, conquer, and subjugate all forms, not only the new but the old—not for the purpose of reconciling itself with the old, but to be able to convert all and sundry forms, new and old, into a weapon for the complete, final, decisive and irrevocable victory of communism.

The Communists must exert every effort to direct the working class movement and the development of society in general along the straightest and quickest way to the universal victory of the Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is an incontestable truth. But it is enough to take one little step farther—a step, it would seem, in the same direction—and truth is transformed into error! To say, as the German and British Left Communists say, that we recognise only one road, only the straight road, that we do not agree with manœuvring, compromises—would be a mistake, which may cause and which in part has caused and is causing very serious harm to communism. Right doctrinairism persisted in recognising only old forms and became totally bankrupt, for it did not perceive the new content. Left doctrinairism persists in the unconditional repudiation of certain old forms and fails to see that the new content is breaking its way through all and sundry forms, that it is our duty as Communists to master all forms, to learn how to supplement with the maximum rapidity one form by another, to

substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics to every change that is called forth by something other than by our class or by our efforts.

World revolution has received such a powerful impetus from the horrors, atrocities and abominations of the world imperialist war and from the hopelessness of the situation created thereby; this revolution is spreading widely and deeply with such supreme rapidity, with such a splendid variety of forms, with such an instructive, practical refutation of all doctrinairism, that there is every ground for hoping for rapid and complete recovery of the international communist movement from the infantile disorder of "Left" Communism.

April 27, 1920.

APPENDIX

Before the publishers in our country—which has been plundered by the imperialists of the whole world in revenge for the proletarian revolution, and is still being plundered and blockaded by them regardless of all promises to their own workers—had succeeded in getting out my pamphlet, additional material arrived from abroad. By no means laying claim to presenting in my pamphlet anything more than the hasty notes of a publicist, I shall only briefly touch upon a few points.

I

The Split Among the German Communists

The split among the Communists in Germany has become an accomplished fact. The "Lefts" or the "opposition on principle," have formed a separate Communist Labour Party as distinct from the Communist Party. Apparently, in Italy matters are also leading up to a split—I say, apparently, as I have only two numbers (Nos. 7 and 8) of the Left newspaper, *Il Soviet*, in which the possibility and the inevitability of a split is openly discussed, and mention is also made of a congress of the "Abstentionist" or boycottist faction, *i.e.*, the opponents of participation in parliament. Hitherto this faction was part of the Italian Socialist Party.

There is reason to apprehend that the split with the "Lefts," the anti-parliamentarians (in part also anti-politicals, opposed to a political party and to work in the trade unions), will become an international phenomenon, like the split with the "Centrists" (*i.e.*, the Kautskyists, Longuetists, "Independents," etc.). Be it so. At all events a split is preferable to confusion which impedes the ideological, theoretical and revolutionary growth and maturing of the Party and prevents harmonious, really organised practical work that really paves the way for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Let the "Lefts" put themselves to a practical test on a national and international scale; let them try to prepare for (and then to achieve) the dictatorship of the proletariat without a strictly centralised party with an iron discipline, without the ability to master every field, every branch, every variety of political and cultural work. Practical experience will soon make them wiser.

But every effort must be made to prevent the split with the "Lefts" from impeding (or to see that it impedes as little as possible) the necessary amalgamation into a single party—which is inevitable in the near future—of all those in the working class movement who stand sincerely and whole-heartedly for the Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Russia the Bolsheviks had the particular good fortune to have fifteen years in which to wage a systematic and decisive struggle against the Mensheviks (that is to say, the opportunists and "Centrists") and also against the "Lefts," long before the direct mass struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. In Europe and America the same work has now to be performed by means of "forced marches." Individuals, especially those belonging to the category of unsuccessful pretenders to leadership, may (if lacking in proletarian discipline, and if they are not "honest with themselves") persist for a long time in their mistakes, but the working masses, when the time is ripe, will easily and quickly unite themselves and unite all sincere Communists in a single party that will be capable of establishing the Soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat.*

* With regard to the question of the future amalgamation of the "Left" Communists, anti-parliamentarians, and Communists in general, I shall make the following additional remarks: as far as I have been able to make myself familiar with the newspapers of the "Left" Communists and those of the Communists in general in Germany, I find that the former are superior to the latter in that they are better agitators among the masses. I have repeatedly observed something analogous in the history of the Bolshevik Party, though on a smaller scale and in individual local organisations, never on a national scale. For instance, in 1907-1908 the "Left" Bolsheviks, on certain occasions and in certain places, carried on more successful agitation among the masses than we did. This may be explained in part by the fact that in a revolutionary moment, or at a time when revolutionary recollections are still fresh, it is easier to approach the masses with tactics of "mere" negation. This, however, can hardly serve as an argument for the correctness of such tactics. At all events, there is not the least doubt that the Communist *Party*—which actually wishes to be the vanguard of the revolutionary *class*, of the proletariat, and which, in addition, wishes to lead the broad *masses*, not only the proletarian but also the non-proletarian masses of toilers and exploited—must necessarily know how to

II

The Communists and the Independents in Germany

In this pamphlet I expressed the opinion that a compromise between the Communists and the Left wing of the Independents was necessary and useful to communism, but that it would not be easy to effect it. The newspapers which I have subsequently received have confirmed this opinion in both its parts. In No. 32 of *The Red Flag*, the organ of the C.C. of the Communist Party of Germany (*Die Rote Fahne*, Zentralorgan der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands—Spartakusbund—of March 26, 1920), there appeared a "statement" of this Central Committee on the question of the Kapp and Lüttwitz military "putsch" (conspiracy, adventure) and on the "Socialist government." This statement is perfectly correct from the point of view of its basic premise and of its practical conclusions. Its basic premise is that there is no "objective basis" at the present moment for a dictatorship of the proletariat, in view of the fact that "the majority of the urban workers" support the Independents. The conclusion is: the promise to be a "loyal opposition" (*i.e.*, renunciation of preparations for a "violent overthrow") to a "Socialist government if it excludes bourgeois-capitalist parties."

Undoubtedly, these tactics, in the main, are correct. But, although it is not worth while dwelling on trifling inexactitudes of formulation, we cannot refrain from saying that we cannot (in an official statement of the Communist Party) describe a government of social traitors as a "Socialist" government; that it is impermissible to speak of the exclusion of "bourgeois-capitalist parties," when the parties of both Scheidemann and Messrs. Kautsky and Crispien are petty-bourgeois-democratic parties, that it is impermissible to write such things as we read in paragraph 4 of the statement, which declares:

> . . . For the further winning of the proletarian masses for communism a state of things where political freedom could be enjoyed without restraint, where bourgeois democracy could not manifest itself as a dictatorship of capital, is of the greatest importance from the point of view of development toward the proletarian dictatorship.

organise, how to carry on propaganda and agitation in the most comprehensible, most clear and vivid manner, not only in the factory districts of the towns but also in the rural districts.

Such a state of things is an impossibility. Petty-bourgeois leaders, the German Hendersons (the Scheidemanns) and Snowdens (the Crispiens), do not and cannot go beyond the bounds of bourgeois democracy, which, in its turn, cannot but be a dictatorship of capital. From the point of view of the attainment of the practical results for which the Central Committee of the Communist Party has been most rightly striving, there was no necessity at all to write such a statement, which is wrong in principle and politically harmful. For this purpose it would have been sufficient to say (if one wished to indulge in parliamentary amenities): As long as the majority of the urban workers follow the Independents, we Communists must place no obstacles in the way of these workers overcoming their last petty-bourgeois-democratic (consequently, also "bourgeois-capitalist") illusions by going through the experience of having "their own" government. This is sufficient as a basis for a compromise, which is really necessary and which means that, for a certain period, all attempts at a violent overthrow of a government which enjoys the confidence of a majority of the urban workers must be abandoned. But in every-day mass agitation, in which we are not bound by official parliamentary amenities, it is, of course, possible to add: Let knaves like the Scheidemanns and philistines like the Kautsky-Crispiens actually reveal the full extent to which they have made fools of themselves and are making fools of the workers; their "clean" government will itself do the "cleanest" job of "cleansing" the Augean stables of socialism, Social-Democracy, and other forms of social treachery.

The real nature of the present leaders of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany (of those leaders about whom it is wrongly said that they have already lost all influence, whereas, in reality, they are even more dangerous to the proletariat than the Hungarian Social-Democrats who styled themselves Communists and promised to "support" the dictatorship of the proletariat) was revealed again and again during the German Kornilov period—*i.e.*, during the Kapp-Lüttwitz "putsch."* A small but striking illustration is afforded by two brief articles—one by Karl Kautsky entitled "*Entscheidende Stunden*" (*Decisive Moments*) in the *Frei-*

* Incidentally, this has been elucidated, in an exceptionally clear, concise, exact and Marxist manner, in the excellent newspaper published by the Austrian Communist Party (*Die Rote Fahne*, Vienna, Nos. 266 and 267, of March 28 and 30, 1920; L. L.: "*Ein neuer Abschnitt der deutschen Revolution*").

heit, the organ of the Independents, of March 30, 1920, and one by Arthur Crispien entitled "On the Political Situation" (*ibid.*, April 14, 1920). These gentlemen are absolutely incapable of thinking and reasoning like revolutionaries. They are snivelling petty-bourgeois democrats, who are a thousand times more dangerous to the proletariat when they proclaim themselves to be adherents of the Soviet power and of the dictatorship of the proletariat, because, in fact, in every difficult and dangerous situation they are sure to commit treachery . . . while "sincerely" convinced that they are helping the proletariat! The Hungarian Social-Democrats, after becoming "converted" to communism, also claimed that they wanted to "help" the proletariat, when, through cowardice and spinelessness, they considered the situation of the Soviet power in Hungary to be hopeless, and began to snivel before the agents of the Entente capitalists and of the Entente hangmen.

III

Turati and Co. in Italy

The issues of the Italian newspaper, *Il Soviet*, referred to above, fully confirm what I have said in this pamphlet regarding the error of the Italian Socialist Party, which tolerates such members and even such a group of parliamentarians in its ranks. It is still further confirmed by such an impartial observer as the Rome correspondent of the British bourgeois-liberal newspaper, *The Manchester Guardian*, whose interview with Turati is published in that paper on March 12, 1920:

> Signor Turati's opinion is that the revolutionary peril is not such as to cause undue anxiety in Italy. The Maximalists are playing with the fire of Soviet theories only to keep the masses roused and in a state of excitement. These theories are, however, merely legendary notions, unripe programmes unfit for practical use. They can only serve to keep the working classes in a state of expectation. The very men who use them as a lure to dazzle proletarian eyes find themselves compelled to fight a daily battle for the extortion of some often trifling economic improvements, so as to put off the day when the working class will shed their illusions and faith in their favourite myths. Hence a long string of strikes of all dimensions, called on any pretext, up to the very latest ones in the mail and railway services—strikes which make the already hard conditions of the country still worse. The country is irritated owing to the difficulties connected with its Adriatic problem, it is weighed down by its foreign debt and by the excessive issue of paper cur-

rency, and yet it is still far from realising the necessity of adopting that discipline of work which alone can restore order and prosperity.

It is as clear as daylight that this English correspondent has blurted out the truth, which, in all probability, is concealed and glossed over by Turati himself and by his bourgeois defenders, supporters and inspirers in Italy. For the truth is that the ideas and the political activity of Turati, Treves, Modigliani, Dugoni and Co. are really and precisely such as are described by the English correspondent. It is all social treachery. The advocacy of order and discipline among the workers, who are wage slaves toiling to enrich the capitalists, is precious! And how familiar all these Menshevik speeches are to us Russians! What a valuable admission, that the masses are *in favour* of the Soviet power! What a stupid and vulgarly bourgeois lack of understanding of the revolutionary rôle of spontaneously spreading strikes! Yes, yes, the English correspondent of the bourgeois-liberal newspaper has rendered a bad service to Turati and Co. and has well confirmed the correctness of the demand of Comrade Bordiga and his friends of *Il Soviet*, who are insisting on the Italian Socialist Party, if it really wants to be *in favour* of the Third International, expelling Turati and Co. from its ranks with all the ignominy they deserve, and on it becoming a Communist Party both in name and in deed.

IV

Incorrect Conclusions from Correct Premises

But Comrade Bordiga and his "Left" friends draw from their correct criticism of Turati and Co. the wrong conclusion that participation in parliament in general is harmful. The Italian "Lefts" cannot advance even a shadow of serious argument in support of this view. They simply do not know (or they are trying to forget) the international examples of really revolutionary and communist utilisation of bourgeois parliaments, a utilisation which has been of unquestionable value in preparing for the proletarian revolution. They simply cannot conceive of a "new" form of utilising parliament but shout and endlessly repeat themselves about the "old," non-Bolshevik method of utilising parliamentarism.

This is precisely where they make their mistake. Not only in

the parliamentary field but in *all* fields of activity communism *must introduce* (and without long, persistent, stubborn effort it will *be unable* to introduce) something new in principle, that represents a radical break with the traditions of the Second International (while retaining and developing that which was good in the latter).

Let us take, say, journalistic work. Newspapers, pamphlets, and manifestoes perform the necessary work of propaganda, agitation and organisation. Not a single mass movement could dispense with a journalistic apparatus in any country that is at all civilised. No outcries against "leaders," no solemn vows to preserve the purity of the masses from the influence of leaders can relieve one of the necessity of utilising bourgeois intellectuals for this work, will relieve one from the bourgeois-democratic, "private-property" atmosphere and environment in which this work is carried on under capitalism. Even two and a half years after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, after the conquest of political power by the proletariat, we still have this atmosphere around us, this mass (peasant, artisan) environment of bourgeois-democratic property relations.

Parliamentarism is one form of activity, journalism another. The content of both can be communist, and should be communist, if the active workers in both spheres are really Communists, are really members of a proletarian mass party. Yet, neither in one nor in the other sphere—nor *in any sphere of activity* under capitalism and during the transition period from capitalism to socialism—is it possible to avoid those difficulties which the proletariat must overcome, those special problems which the proletariat must solve in order to make use of the services of those who have come from the bourgeois class for its own purposes, in order to gain a victory over bourgeois intellectual prejudices and influences, in order to weaken the resistance of (and, ultimately, to completely transform) the petty-bourgeois environment.

Did we not before the war of 1914-1918 witness in all countries an abundance of instances of extreme "Left" anarchists, syndicalists and others denouncing parliamentarism, deriding parliamentary Socialists who had degenerated into bourgeois, flaying their careerism and so forth, and yet themselves making the same kind of bourgeois career *through* journalism and *through* work in the syndicates (trade unions)? To limit oneself to France, are not the examples of Messrs. Jouhaux and Merrheim typical?

The childishness of those who "repudiate" participation in par-

liament lies precisely in the fact that they think it is possible by such a "simple," "easy," allegedly revolutionary method to *solve* the difficult problem of combating bourgeois-democratic influences in the working class movement. In reality they are only fleeing from their own shadow, only closing their eyes to difficulties, only trying to brush them aside with mere words. Without a doubt shameless careerism, bourgeois utilisation of parliamentary posts, glaring reformist perversion of parliamentary activity, vulgar, petty-bourgeois routine—all these are the usual and prevalent features which capitalism generates everywhere, not only outside of but also inside the working class movement. But this capitalism and the bourgeois environment created by it (and which disappears very slowly even after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, because the peasantry is constantly regenerating the bourgeoisie) give rise to what is essentially bourgeois careerism, national chauvinism, petty-bourgeois vulgarity, etc., in positively every sphere of activity and life, differing only in insignificant variations in form.

You, dear boycottists and anti-parliamentarians, think that you are "terribly revolutionary," but in reality you have become *frightened* by the comparatively small difficulties of the struggle against bourgeois influences in the working class movement, whereas your victory—*i.e.*, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the conquest of political power by the proletariat—will create *these very* difficulties on a still larger, on an infinitely larger scale. Like children, you have become frightened at a small difficulty which confronts you to-day, and you fail to understand that to-morrow and the day after you will have to learn to overcome the same difficulties, only on an immeasurably greater scale.

Under a Soviet power your and our proletarian Party will be invaded by an ever-growing number of bourgeois intellectuals. They will worm their way into the Soviets, into the courts, and into the administration, for it is only possible to build up communism with the aid of the human material created by capitalism. It is impossible to expel and to destroy the bourgeois intelligentsia, it is necessary to win over this intelligentsia, to remould, to retrain and to re-educate it, just as it is necessary to re-educate—in a protracted struggle, on the basis of the dictatorship of the proletariat—the proletarians themselves, who do not abandon their petty-bourgeois prejudices at one stroke, by a miracle, at the behest of the Virgin Mary, at the behest of a slogan, resolution, or decree, but only in

the course of a long and difficult mass struggle against mass petty-bourgeois influences. Under the Soviet power the same problems—which at the present time the anti-parliamentarians so proudly, so haughtily, so lightly and so childishly brush aside with a wave of the hand—*these very same* problems are arising anew *within* the Soviets, within the Soviet administration, among the Soviet "legal defenders." (In Russia we abolished, and rightly abolished, the bourgeois legal Bar, but it is reviving in the guise of "Soviet," "legal defenders.") Among the Soviet engineers, the Soviet teachers, and the privileged (*i.e.*, the most highly skilled and best situated) *workers* in the Soviet factories we observe a constant revival of absolutely *all* the negative traits peculiar to bourgeois parliamentarism, and only by constant, tireless, prolonged and stubborn struggle, by proletarian organisation and discipline, will we gradually conquer this evil.

Of course, under the rule of the bourgeoisie it is very "difficult" to conquer bourgeois habits in our own Party, *i.e.*, the workers' Party; it is "difficult" to expel from the Party the old-time parliamentary leaders who are hopelessly corrupted by bourgeois prejudices; it is "difficult" to subject to proletarian discipline the absolutely necessary number (even if very limited) of bourgeois intellectuals; it is "difficult" to form in a bourgeois parliament a Communist fraction worthy of the working class; it is "difficult" to insure that the Communist parliamentarians do not play at the bourgeois parliamentary game of skittles, but take up the very urgent work of propaganda, agitation, and organisation of the masses. All this is very "difficult," there is no doubt about it; it was difficult in Russia, and it is incomparably more difficult in western Europe and in America, where the bourgeoisie is far stronger, where bourgeois democratic traditions, etc., are far stronger.

Yet all these "difficulties" are mere child's play compared with *precisely the same sort* of problems which the proletariat will in any event inevitably be obliged to solve for the sake of its victory during the proletarian revolution and after the seizure of power by the proletariat. Compared with *these* tasks of re-educating under the proletarian dictatorship, millions of peasants and petty proprietors, hundreds of thousands of employees, officials and bourgeois intellectuals, of subordinating all these to the proletarian state and to proletarian leadership, of overcoming their bourgeois habits and traditions—in comparison with these gigantic tasks it is a childishly

easy matter to establish, under the rule of the bourgeoisie, a really Communist fraction of a real proletarian party in a bourgeois parliament.

If our "Left" and anti-parliamentarian comrades do not now learn to overcome even such a small difficulty, we may assert with confidence that they either will prove incapable of achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat, will be unable on a broad scale to subordinate and remould the bourgeois intellectuals and bourgeois institutions; or they will have to *complete their education in a hurry*, and in consequence of such haste they will do a great deal of harm to the cause of the proletariat, they will commit more errors than usual, will manifest more than the average weakness and inefficiency, and so on and so forth.

As long as the bourgeoisie is in power, as long as small scale economy and petty commodity production exist—the bourgeois atmosphere, proprietary habits, and petty-bourgeois traditions will impede proletarian work both outside and inside the working class movement, not only in the sphere of parliamentary activity but inevitably in each and every sphere of social activity, in all cultural and political spheres without exception. The attempt to brush aside, to fence oneself off from *one* of the "unpleasant" problems or difficulties in one field of activity is a profound mistake and one which later will certainly have to be paid for dearly. It is necessary to learn how to master every sphere of activity and work without exception, to overcome everywhere all difficulties and all bourgeois habits, customs and traditions. Any other method of presenting the question is mere trifling, mere childishness.

May 12, 1920.

V

In the Russian edition of this pamphlet I slightly misrepresented the conduct of the Communist Party of Holland as a whole in the realm of international revolutionary politics. I therefore take this opportunity to publish the following letter from our Dutch comrades on this point, and, further, to correct the expression "Dutch Tribunists," which I used in the Russian text, and to substitute for it "some members of the Communist Party of Holland."

N. Lenin.

Comrade Wynkoop's Letter

Moscow, June 30, 1920.

Dear Comrade Lenin,

Thanks to your kindness, we, the members of the Dutch Delegation to the Second Congress of the Communist International, had the opportunity to peruse your book, *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, before the translations into the western European languages were published. In this book you emphasise several times your disapproval of the rôle some of the members of the Communist Party of Holland have played in international politics.

We must protest against your making the Communist Party responsible for their conduct. It is utterly incorrect. Moreover, it is unjust, as these members of the Communist Party of Holland have taken little or no part in the current work of our Party; they are also striving, directly or indirectly to introduce in the Communist Party opposition slogans against which the Communist Party of Holland and every one of its organs have been carrying on and are carrying on to this very day, a most energetic struggle.

Fraternally yours,

(For the Dutch Delegation) D. J. Wynkoop.